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Secret Political Societies in the North during the Civil War

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I INTRODUCTION

The history of a secret political society is difficult to unravel. Especially is this true of a secret political organization whose principles have been condemned as pernicious and treasonable by a large majority of the people and whose records have been destroyed in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of government officials. The difficulty is materially increased when the feeling against such societies is so violent as to lead, not only the press, but public officials, as well, to make strangely extravagant statements in their reports concerning the operations of the societies.

In an attempt to determine their extent, purpose, and influence, the writer was confronted with a combination of difficulties. In the first place, men who were members of these orders, or members of the party from which the orders recruited their ranks, either denied the existence of any such societies, or minimized their extent and importance; while men who were opposed to their principles, were inclined to magnify the dangers resulting from their operations and attribute to them a treason worse than rebellion. The excitement of the Civil war times prevented men from taking a moderate view of such matters. It was a period of strong

partisan feeling. There were few who could see any middle ground between intense patriotism and active disloyalty; between devotion to the union and sympathy for secession; between a "peace democrat" and a "hissing copperhead". The bitter animosities then existing seemed to confound all distinctions. "He that is not for us is against us" was interpreted in its most literal sense. And so, Democrats, Copperheads, Butternuts, Knights of the Golden Circle, Sons of Liberty and rebels, were jumbled into one hodge-podge of "hissing traitors". As a result, all the material bearing upon the history of these societies, official documents as well as unofficial, must be weighed in the light of these peculiarly intense times.

The student might expect that the lapse of fifty years would tend to soften and dissolve these extreme views, and that survivors of those days could now recall the exciting events with less of partisan bias; but it is not the case. Most of these men, who are still living, retain the bitter animosities which characterized the days of the rebellion, and all attempts to secure from them a moderate estimate of these societies have failed. Some five hundred letters of inquiry, containing lists of definite questions, were sent to these survivors, representative men of both parties in all sections of the country; and probably half as many personal conferences were held. The information thus obtained contains little of real historical value. In reply to the questions, "What was the avowed purpose of the order", "The relations of the political parties in your community to the order", and "The character of the membership"? the supporters of the Republican party uniformly reply, in substance, "The order which was composed entirely of Democrats, had for its avowed purpose the overthrow of the government and the lending of assistance to the southern rebels." The members of the Democratic party reply, "The avowed purpose of the order which was composed of the riffraff of the Democratic party, was the protection of the rights of the citizen against the usurpation and tyranny of the Republican administration". Many who were known to be members of the order, refused to give any information whatever concerning its operations. The effort was made

in a number of cases to secure statements from these men through relatives, or close friends; but the odium which attached itself to the societies, and that peculiar sense of obligation which men have for secret vows even though the society in which they were taken may have long since become extinct, have made even these indirect efforts of little avail.

The failure to obtain reliable information from these survivors, however, did not materially affect the scope of this investigation, for there still remained a mass of valuable contemporary source material in the form of newspapers, manuscripts in the state department at Washington, the War of the Rebellion Official Records, the official records of the several trials before military commissions, and numerous diaries and biographies of men of the time. All of this source material was carefully scanned and analyzed in the effort to reach a fair estimate of the extent and influence of these secret societies which so disturbed the loyal people in the States bordering on the Mason and Dixon line during the trying days of the Civil war. This study has resulted in the following narrative and conclusions.

The plan, at first, contemplated maps and tables showing the distribution and number of the lodges, but exact numerical details, it was found, could not be obtained in sufficient quantity for such an exhibit. Therefore in this direction no attempt at anything beyond an approximation has been made. The result, then, of this investigation is an estimation of the importance of the secret associations on the struggle of 1861 to 1865, rather than an exhaustive, detailed account of their operations.

2. ORIGIN OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

In July, 1863, there appeared at the headquarters of Gen. William S. Rosecrans in central Tennessee a surgeon from the Confederate army who gave his name as Dr. George W. L. Bickley and requested permission to pass through the lines to his home in Cincinnati. He excused his Confederate uniform and his presence in the Confederate army by saying that he was caught in the south at the outbreak of the war and was forced to join the southern army as a surgeon in order to get

through the lines. The federal authorities granted him a pass but not without some suspicion as to his real character. They stipulated that on his way home he must travel by way of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and make no stops between Memphis and Cincinnati.

Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside, then commanding at Cincinnati, was informed by telegram that Dr. Bickley was on his way north under pass from General Rosecrans and that it might be well to watch his movements. Instead of fulfilling the stipulation to go directly to Cincinnati Bickley stopped off at New Albany, Indiana. The authorities were notified of this and General Boyle at Louisville was directed to watch him and, if he deemed it advisable, arrest him. On July 17 Bickley and his wife were put under arrest at New Albany and their baggage seized. An examination of their persons and effects revealed sufficient evidence to prove that Dr. Bickley was no other than the originator of the secret political order known as "The Knights of the Golden Circle", which was at that time causing such apprehension along the border. On the person of Mrs. Bickley was found the great seal of the order bearing the emblem of a Maltese cross surmounted by a star and encircled by the inscription, "Great Seal of the K's of the G.C., 1856". With the seal was found a number of metal stars, emblems of the order. In Bickley's trunk, among a number of incriminating papers and letters, were found several copies of a pamphlet containing the "Rules, Regulations and Principles" of the order; a newspaper clipping from the Richmond *Whig* containing an "Open Letter" of George Bickley, "K.G.C., President of American Legion", dated July 17, 1860; a key to the grips, signs, passwords, etc., of the Knights of the Golden Circle; a copy of a letter from George Bickley to the secretary of war of the Confederate States offering to furnish a mounted brigade; and a card on which was engraved a Confederate flag with the three letters, K.G.C. printed in bold type across the bars. Above and below the flag were the words "General George Bickley, Mexico and a United South".¹

This evidence strengthened by the sworn statements of

¹ "Papers relating to the case of George W. L. Bickley", found in the Judge Advocate General's office, contain most of material for Chapter I. References to them will be indicated by the abbreviation "Bickley Papers".

two witnesses regarding their acquaintance with Bickley was deemed sufficient to justify his imprisonment. On August 18 he was transferred without trial to the State penitentiary at Columbus, Ohio, where he was held until March 20, 1864. He was then taken to Fort Lafayette where he remained until March, 1865. From there he was transferred to Fort Warren where he was held until his release in October of that year.

During his incarceration Bickley made numerous efforts to secure his release. He wrote to General Burnside in Cincinnati, to Gen. John A. Dix in New York, to Secretary of War Stanton, and finally to the President, imploring their interposition in his behalf. In all the communications he admitted his connection with the Knights of the Golden Circle, "an order which was established for the purpose of colonizing Mexico", but denied that it had any relation to the secret political order known by that name, then existing in the border States. Inquiries were sent out from the office of the secretary of war to officials acquainted with the character of the prisoner to learn the reasons for his detention. The reply in each case was that Bickley is a dangerous man and should not be released during the continuance of the rebellion. In the report from the judge-advocate general's office, reviewing the case, Bickley is alluded to as "the chief of the treasonable association known as the Knights of the Golden Circle, an officer in the rebel army, a conspicuously disloyal individual", and "a most mischievous as well as dangerous character", and "his personal restraint is, for these reasons, advised".²

The arrest and incarceration of Bickley was not in itself a matter of particular moment—his was only one of the numerous military arrests made during the summer of 1863. But his relations to the secret order of the Knights of the Golden Circle made his arrest a matter of more than local interest, since at that moment the operations of the order were causing considerable uneasiness in the border States and arousing serious apprehensions in the minds of many supporters of the union cause.

From the beginning of the struggle there had been considerable opposition to the war in the north, but particularly

² Bickley Papers, A. A. Hosmer, acting Judge Advocate to Secretary Stanton, July 17, 1865.

along the border where the influence of southern social and political ideas was strong. This opposition had gradually increased with the progress of the war and its attending severities. Every new call for troops, every new draft, every defeat of the union armies, and every military arrest brought forth another groan from the opponents of the administration. The disaffected element, which at no time had been in sympathy with the war, felt more and more the burden of taxation and the numerous restraints placed upon their liberties by the State and federal governments. These were made all the more unbearable when imposed by soldiers and officers of the administration—men from their own communities who keenly enjoyed the emotions of authority and dominance. Moreover, they witnessed in their midst the organization of a semi-secret order called the "Union League", whose purpose, as they viewed it, was the rendering of assistance to the already tyrannical government in the enforcement of its tyrannical measures. These experiences, coupled with an already strong prejudice against the party in power, and, in many cases, a close sympathy with the cause of the southern States, led many into more than open protest against the administration—into secret organization, which under a strict interpretation of the constitution might be classed as "giving aid and comfort to the enemy". Whether or not this secret opposition should prove formidable, depended upon the organizing ability of the leaders and their courage. But the fact that their movements were secret and that their plans were maturing at a time when the most sanguine supporter of the union was depressed with a feeling of doubt as to the fate of the nation, made the danger seem a real one and caused the patriots to regard their machinations with a deep solicitude.

The secret political and military societies, popularly known as the "Knights of the Golden Circle", "Knights of the Columbian Star", "Order of American Knights", and "Sons of Liberty", were scattered over a number of the central and western States. They were strongly intrenched in southern California;³ a number of lodges were reported in Michigan

³ *War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. L, Part II., p. 938. Reference to these records will be indicated by the abbreviation *O. R.*

and Iowa; sworn statements by officers of the order indicated their existence in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware; in several counties in Pennsylvania prosperous and active lodges were discovered; one lodge was reported in what was then Washington territory;⁴ even as far north as Boston the secret agents of the organizations attempted to gain a foothold. These societies, however, were most prosperous in the border States along the Ohio and Mississippi regions which had been settled largely by immigrants from the mountains of North Carolina, Tennessee, and other sections of the seceding States.

The actual membership of the various societies will never be known. No correct and complete files were kept and the meager information in the hands of local State secretaries was destroyed when the plans of the order were exposed in 1864. Various estimates have been made by leading members and by government officials who were engaged in ferreting out their plans. C. E. Dunn, second in command of the order in Missouri, in a sworn statement before Provost Marshal Sanderson at St. Louis in July, 1864, declared the membership of the American Knights in that State to be 100,000; in Illinois, 100,000; in Indiana, 125,000; in Ohio, 40,000; in Michigan, 20,000 to 25,000.⁵ In southern California alone the membership was estimated at 24,000, while the order could control at least 50,000 men.⁶ In conference with the Confederate agents in Canada in 1864, Mr. Clement L. Vallandigham represented the strength of the Sons of Liberty at 300,000, of whom 85,000 were in Illinois; 50,000 in Indiana; and 40,000 in Ohio.⁷ In a speech at Dayton, in the summer of 1863, he placed the number at 500,000, which Judge Advocate Holt, in his report concerning "Secret Associations and Conspiracies against the Government", says "is much nearer the true total".⁸

These secret associations bore different names in different sections and at different periods of the war. In St. Louis the organization was called at one time "Corps de Belgique"; in

⁴ O. R. I, Vol. L, pt. II, p. 1056.

⁵ O. R. II, Vol. VII, p. 629.

⁶ O. R. I, Vol. L, pt. II, p. 940.

⁷ *The Southern Bivouac*, Vol. II, p. 206.

⁸ O. R. II, Vol. VII, p. 930.

Chicago "The Democratic Invincible Club"; in Louisville "The Democratic Reading Room"; in California the "Knights of the Columbian Star". In other localities they were known as the "Knights of the Mighty Host", "Knights of the Circle of Honor" and "Mutual Protection Society". But the names by which they were generally known were "Knights of the Golden Circle", "Order of American Knights", and "Sons of Liberty". While it cannot be definitely proven that one is the parent organization and the others the offspring, yet they follow each other so closely in time and purpose, and are composed of so nearly the same element in the membership that the popular mind has been justified in thinking them one and the same in almost every particular except the name.

The parent association "The Knights of the Golden Circle", as has been noted, had its origin in the fertile brain of Dr. George W. L. Bickley, a practicing physician, a professor of materia medica in the Eastern Medical college of Cincinnati, and a professor of medical jurisprudence in the Ohio Law school. Bickley was a man of more than ordinary literary ability, as shown by the papers found on his person when he was captured. He wrote much and was for a time editor and publisher of a magazine.⁹ He no doubt kept himself well informed on public questions which in the decade before the war were so seriously disturbing the country. One of his chief characteristics seems to have been a tendency to evolve elaborate schemes on paper, one of which was this secret order of the Knights of the Golden Circle.

In 1854 when the visionary William S. Walker was planning his filibustering project in Lower California, and the whole country, especially, the south, was disturbed by various projects of this kind, the Knights of the Golden Circle was organized in Cincinnati and started on its career by the inauguration of lodges in that city and in two small towns in that section of the State. Its object as stated in the ritual was the "entire and speedy conquest of Mexico and the establishment of a separate and independent nation upon such a basis as to render it subservient to the march of American civiliza-

⁹ *The American Cavalier*, a military journal devoted to the extension of American civilization—only one copy seen.

tion". In justification of this object the "rules" laid down the doctrine that

Each and every American citizen has a right to denationalize himself and become a citizen of any other nation, and he has the unquestionable right (when once there) to rebel against the existing government (as in the case of Texas) and attempt the establishment of a new government. . . . When a nation has lost its nationality—where society has given up its existence—then the territory so occupied is thrown open to adventurers from civilized nations and may be seized by them for the purpose of Christian civilization.¹⁰

Mexico, they assured themselves, was in this sad state and, therefore, open to christian domination.

The "rules, regulations and principles" which were to govern the order were issued by the "Congress of the K.C.S. (Knights Commanders South), and the General President" from the headquarters at Washington, D.C. They provided for two sections, the Mexican Legion and the American Legion. Bickley was commander-in-chief of the American Legion and the General President. The regulations provided for civil and military departments; but since the object of the order was the invasion and conquest of foreign territory, the military department received most attention. The laws for its government provided that the American Legion

Shall consist of four divisions, each perfect within itself, each commanded by a marshal, who shall be responsible to the commander-in-chief.

There were to be divisions consisting of two brigades; brigades of two regiments; and regiments of companies; after the plan of the the existing military system in the United States army.

Provision was made for cavalry and artillery companies. Salaries for officers and enlisted men were specified. In addition to the salaries grants of land were promised. Enlisted men were to receive 640 acres; lieutenants, 960 acres; captains, 1,280 acres; majors, 2,560 acres; marshals, 2,880 acres; and the commander-in-chief, 3,200 acres. Each member was required to take an oath to support and sustain the government established by the American Legion and its legal repre-

¹⁰ Art. 38, *The Rules, Regulations and Principles* is a pamphlet of some fifty pages. Only two copies known to be preserved—one in State Department, the other in War Department, Washington, D. C.

sentatives. He was also required to obligate himself "not to do anything which in his judgment would be contrary to the best interest of the United States of America", and to "protect and defend the same against any foreign power whatsoever". Further, "If at any time the United States should become involved in a foreign war the services of the legion shall be promptly tendered to the United States government, and in no instance will the legion be allowed to take up arms against the United States".

There were three degrees in the order.¹¹ The First or Company degree was a purely military one given to every member of the legion who was to bear arms. It insisted upon secrecy, true allegiance, and obedience to the K.G.C. The Second or Brigade degree was practically the same as the First except that it was not administered to the company at large, but only to the non-commissioned officers, and stated clearly the full purpose of the order, namely, "the conquest of Mexico and the establishment of a civilized government in the conquered territory". The Third or Division degree was taken only by the commissioned officers who were to become a part of the army council. In this degree the detailed plan of campaign of the 55 (K.G.C.) was set forth as follows:

All companies are to move so as to reach 17 and 18 on a given day. The city and federal authorities of those places are already pledged to assist us off. Our arms, munitions, and material having been previously sent there from the several depots. All will be shipped together and form one solid fleet, with sufficient armament to beat off any interfering power. Eight and 9 have each promised us a frigate as convoys, and we must have a good steamer of our own. Our landing point must be 2.¹² As soon as our independence is recognized, we will then throw open our ports and invite immigration.

Finally after all had rebelled and come over to them they would control the Gulf and the destinies of 12.¹²

The Articles of War for the government of the K.G.C. contained the following oath to which every soldier and officer was compelled to subscribe:

I, ———, of my own free will, do solemnly swear or affirm (as the case may be) that I will bear true allegiance to the K.G.C. and its lawful

¹¹ *Degree Book*, a separate pamphlet of only a few pages in extent.

¹² It is not known to what places these figures refer. The key found with the papers does not fit the numbers. 12 evidently means Mexico.

officers, and I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies, and I will never desert my brethren in arms, but I will protect them and their interests as far as I possibly can; and I will do no act knowingly in violation of the laws of the K.G.C. I will support the government established by my brothers in arms and their officers.

The regulations contained provisions for the organization of castles in all parts of the country and also a long list of social and political maxims which were generalities of no particular import. Mention was made of a colonization and steamship company which was to furnish the capital necessary to carry out the designs of the K.G.C.

It will be seen from these extracts that the purpose of the organization at the time of its inauguration was filibustering pure and simple. No statement in the ritual or degree book can be interpreted as indicating treason to the government of the United States. In fact, the members were bound to defend the government against any foreign power. The association might involve the United States in serious international difficulties, but this could not be called treason; and evidently there was no treasonable intention in the mind of the founder, when he conceived the principles embodied in this new secret society.

General Bickley, after his arrest and incarceration at Fort Lafayette, New York Harbor, in 1864, insisted that the policy of the K.G.C. to Americanize and incorporate Mexico and the United States into one common republic was not treason, but was "the offspring of that generally accepted policy known as the Monroe Doctrine which has become as much a part of Americanism as our theory of republican government."¹³ Concerning the filibustering aspect of the society he wrote in the same letter:

But, sir, you may say the whole scheme was a secession filibusterism. I beg to say that secession was the bane of the organization, and that so far as its filibustering aspect goes, my country is guiltier than I. We commenced filibustering at Plymouth Rock, at Jamestown, at Roanoke Island, under the leadership of the Pilgrim Fathers . . . ; we filibustered the red men out of their ancestral domain and built up an empire of Christian civilization that has merited and received the admiration of mankind; we filibustered Spain out of the Floridas, France out of Louisiana Territory,

¹³ Bickley Papers. Bickley to Stanton, Jan. 16, 1865.

Mexico out of Texas, and, at a later day, out of California; so that if I am a filibusterer my country is my tutor.

It is not known by what method or at what time General Bickley set about to extend the organization. According to his own statements, sometime before the outbreak of the war he went south to settle his mother's estate. His brother-in-law, Eli Kinney,¹⁴ says that before the outbreak of the War Bickley had left his wife and was in the south. Judging from the document which was found among his effects when captured, and from the rapid extension of the order in the south and especially in Texas, General Bickley must have devoted most of his time after 1854 to the propagation of this filibustering association. In September, 1859, he issued from Washington, D.C., as "Headquarters of the American Legion K.G.C.", a proclamation in which he proposed the invasion of Mexico by a new and vigorous race, and appealed to the young men of the country by declaring that the K.G.C. opened for them a new field of industry and enterprise. "This continent," he said, "belongs to one people; that people is the Anglo-American." The extent to which this proclamation was made public can not be ascertained.

The first definite information of a public nature regarding the order is found in the *Mobile Mercury* of April 6, 1860. In this issue appeared a general order from the commander which indicates, to some extent, the spread of the society and its seeming strength in the south. The general order, No. 546, called for a meeting of the delegates, of the various lodges or castles¹⁵ at Raleigh, North Carolina, for May 7, 1860, at which time the following business would be transacted: election of a permanent commander of the military department of the K.G.C., a financial secretary, and a president of the governing department; the determination of the equipment and the time of motion; and the preparation of an address to the people of the southern States.

The call stated that no political or religious question then disturbing the country would be entertained by the convention. When the business of the session was completed they were to

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, sworn statement of Eli Kinney before provost marshal.

¹⁵ Local lodges were called "Castles" or "Temples".

adjourn "to meet no more as a convention in the United States."

The *Mercury*, in an editorial of the same date, says of this call:

General George Bickley, through our columns today, issues a general order to the members of his organization. The papers of the south are respectfully requested to extend the order as a matter of service and favor to thousands who belong to the order throughout the southern States. The purpose of this order has been so far revealed as to vindicate it from the suspicion of filibusterism, and to commend it to the favor of thousands who cherish all objects calculated to redound to the glory and interest of our beloved south.

When General Bickley in the call stated that the political questions about to divide the north and south were to have no place in the deliberations at Raleigh, he intended either to blind the eyes of the north as to the true purpose of the meeting, or he had not estimated accurately the state of mind of the membership, as indicated in the address issued to the people of the south at the close of the session.

This address¹⁶ declared that the possession of Mexico by the south was absolutely necessary to the maintenance of political equality in the union. It contained an eloquent description of the fruitfulness of Mexico, the fertility of her soil, her undeveloped capacity for the production of cotton, sugar and tobacco, the suitableness of her climate for slave labor, the enormous wealth of the Romish church, and the advantage of confiscating three hundred million dollars to the use of the K.G.C. It estimated the entire membership of the order at 48,000, and the military force at 18,000. It declared the plans of the K.G.C., in regard to Mexico, to be temporarily postponed but not abandoned; and concluded with the statement:

That the southern governor will have use for us in the next six months is confidently expected. If so, the K.G.C. may find its Mexico in the District of Columbia.

This address indicates a very decided change in the policy of the organization. The change is further emphasized by an open letter to the K.G.C.'s in the *Richmond Whig* of July 7,

¹⁶ *An Authentic Exposition of the Knights of the Golden Circle*, pamphlet published by U. S. National U.C., Feb., 1862.

1860, in which General Bickley urged the south to assist in carrying out the plans of the order. He argued that the county was divided into two parts—northern and southern—and that reconciliation was impossible. “With Mexico Americanized and southernized, the south will equal in territory the north.” He pleaded with the slave-holders to lend financial assistance to the movement, promising them that

No more negroes will be spirited away on the famous Underground Railroad. There will not be a free negro in the southern States in 1870, and your cotton production will be fifteen instead of five million bales.

This same letter contained the names of a number of citizens from various sections of the south, and the names of banks in six different cities in these States to which donations could be sent. It also stated that donations could be sent directly to Colonel N. J. Scott of Auburn, Alabama, who was paymaster general and financial secretary of the organization.

The long list of names and the various banks mentioned to which funds could be sent, indicate that the order by 1860 was pretty well represented in the several slave States. The ritual issued in 1859 asserted that in September of that year, there were 250 working castles embracing 15,000 members, and that at least two-thirds of these expected to go to Mexico with the expedition. There is no evidence to prove this estimate false and none to substantiate it. Careful investigation has been made in the south, but insufficient evidence has been found to warrant any definite statement as to the extent of the order, further than that it existed in Kentucky, Arkansas, Alabama, and Texas; the latter State being the most fertile field for its growth.

The rapid development of the society in Texas can be accounted for by its geographical position. Bordering on Mexico, that State was naturally the drill ground for filibustering expeditions. Here such schemes could find a most loyal and enthusiastic support. From here such expeditions could most advantageously invade Mexico. Moreover, the unsettled condition of politics in that State and the antagonism between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery elements added an influence in favor of a secret political organization.

The headquarters of the K.G.C. in Texas were at San

Antonio¹⁷ where two lodges or castles were established. A castle was organized in almost every county.¹⁸ General Bickley took an active personal interest in the society in this State. The funds of the order were applied to the purchase of arms, accoutrements, and ammunition. It was estimated on good authority that 8,000 well equipped men could be brought into the field on four days' notice. When first established in Texas, in 1856, the intention of the organization was simply and solely that of a filibustering expedition into Mexico; but in 1860 when the question of secession was before the people of the State, the order became the instrument for the defense of slavery in Texas. Although the membership was really insignificant when compared to the voting population of the State, its perfect organization and its vow of secrecy made the society strong enough in Texas to control the policy of the Democratic party in the election of 1860.

Nothing further is known concerning the history of the order prior to the outbreak of the war, except that during those days when the southern States were organizing themselves into a confederacy the Knights of the Golden Circle was a subject of frequent comment in the Confederate capitol at Montgomery.¹⁹ It is manifest, however, that the society could have no place as a filibustering scheme in the midst of the great and all-absorbing movement of secession. Nor was there any place for its operations in the heart of the Confederacy, even as an organization in sympathy with secession, for secret societies find no soil where the people are so unanimously of one opinion. The only field in which it could operate successfully as an ally of the confederacy or as an opponent of the federal administration was the immediate territory on each side of the Mason and Dixon line where the sentiment of the people was about equally divided between the north and the south, and where bitter local animosities were greatly intensified by this division of sentiment on national issues.

¹⁷ Moore's *Rebellion Records*, Vol. XII, p. 110. Paper read before N.Y. Hist. Society, June 25, 1861, by Maj. J. T. Sprague.

¹⁸ Williams, *Life of Sam Houston*, 129.

¹⁹ Wm. Howard Russell, "*My Diary North and South*", 185. Russell was correspondent for the *London Times* and wrote from Montgomery, Ala., May 5, 1861: "I hear a good deal about the Association called the Knights of the Golden Circle."

General Bickley, as has been pointed out in the preceding chapter, declared, prior to the Charleston meeting of the representatives of the order, that his organization had no designs hostile to the government; that he intended to avoid the political questions then disturbing the entire country; and that his sole purpose was the acquisition of foreign territory by force of arms, and the introduction into that territory of immigrants from the southern States. The manifesto of the Charleston meeting, however, indicated clearly the sympathy of the organization for the southern cause. The general, a man with more of personal and selfish interest than devotion to a principle, seemed perfectly willing to accept this change of view and to alter the constitution of the order so that it would express this sympathy. All that was needed was a slight change in the ritual. In 1861 this change was made and the rules, regulations, and principles were made to declare that the acquisition of territory in Mexico had, for its primary purpose, the extension of slavery and the political equality of free and slave States.

The First degree of the remodeled ritual reads in part:¹

The first field of our operation is Mexico, but we hold it to be our duty to offer our services to any southern State to repel a northern army. We hope such a contingency may not occur; but whether the union is reconstructed or not, the southern States must foster any scheme having for its object the Americanization and southernization of Mexico, so that in either case our success will be certain.

In the Third, or Political degree, called the "Knights of the Columbian Star" the qualifications for membership indicate, even more clearly, the adaptation of the order to meet the demands of the south. The candidate was required to be familiar with the work of the two former degrees, to be a native of a slave State, or if of a free State, to be a citizen of a slave State, a protestant and a slave-holder. A candidate who was born in a slave State was not required to be a slave-

¹ *Louisville Journal*, July 18, 1861. The editor vouches for the authenticity of the statements regarding the change in the ritual.

holder provided he could give evidence of his character as a southern man. The candidate for this degree was obliged to promise assistance to any southern State which might be invaded by abolitionists, to do all in his power to build up in his community a sentiment favorable to the expulsion of free negroes, and, if he went to Mexico, he was to use his influence to make it a slave state and to urge its annexation to the United States. After the candidate had taken the oath of secrecy, the secretary explained to him that the whole purpose of the organization was the extension of slavery and the establishment of a government in Mexico.

Fortified with this new purpose, that of giving aid to the south in case of actual war, the K.G.C., with its element of secrecy, began its expansion into the territory north of Mason and Dixon line, where, as has been stated, there existed a strong sympathy for the southern cause. Kentucky, where the sentiment was then evenly divided, furnished a fertile field for its development. By August, 1861, it was claimed that the K.G.C. in that State numbered at least 8,000.² Castles were organized in Marion, Barron, Daviess, Christian, and Henderson counties. In Louisville alone it was asserted that nearly or quite 3,000 were admitted into the order, many of whom entered the Confederate service. In May, 1861, a resolution was offered in the Kentucky house of representatives calling for an investigation of the Knights of the Golden Circle, particularly in regard to the introduction of arms into the State. No investigations, however, were made.³ As the war spirit increased and men began openly to espouse the cause of secession and to take up arms to force the State out of the union, the need of a secret order no longer existed in that State, and so the society was forced north of the Mason and Dixon's line where sympathy for the Confederacy was strong, but where it was held in subjection by the arm of the federal government.

A determined effort has been made to ascertain when, how, and by whom, the organization of the Knights of the Golden Circle was introduced into the border States north of the Ohio river, but the labor has resulted in nothing more than

² *The Commonwealth*, Frankfort, Ky., July 31, 1861.

³ *The Southern Bivouac*, Vol. II, p. 641.

a strong supposition based upon rather insufficient evidence. Local tradition in Orange county Indiana, attributes the establishment and, in fact, the origin of the order to Dr. William A. Bowles of that county,⁴ who in 1864 was tried before a military commission at Indianapolis for treason and sentenced to be hanged. The career of this man lends some color to this local tradition. He had a very decided sympathy for the southern cause. His wife was a native of New Orleans and the owner of a number of slaves which she brought to her Indiana home in 1858. The presence of these slaves aroused great indignation in the community and Dr. Bowles was compelled by the courts of the county to send them back to New Orleans. He had served as a colonel in the Second Indiana volunteers in the Mexican war and to him was attributed the disgraceful retreat of the Indiana troops at Buena Vista. His experience in Mexico, his belief in slavery, his southern relations, his wealth, and his natural liking for intrigue fitted him well for the work of promoting a secret association whose filibustering purpose of seizing and Americanizing Mexico had given way temporarily to the more immediate purpose of securing peace between the two sections, even at the cost of separation.

When the rebellion began Dr. Bowles made no attempt to conceal his sympathy for the south. He wrote to his wife, who was then in New Orleans:

If Kentucky had gone out at the proper time, southern Indiana would have been with her today—if not the whole state.⁵

He expressed a desire to join the southern army, but his health was such that he feared he would be of little service, so he decided to remain in the north to protect his property and be of use to the south in the enemy's territory. From the outset of the war he was active in the propagation of these secret societies which opposed the administration; and it is fair to suppose that he had much to do with the introduction of the Knights of the Golden Circle into the border States.

Rumors of secret conspiracies are found in many of the northern papers during the year 1860, but in most cases they

⁴ West Baden, Ind., *Journal*, Feb. 10, 1903.

⁵ Foulke, *Life of Oliver P. Morton*, Vol. I, p. 380.

refer to the general movement of the southern leaders toward secession. On January 9, 1861, a select committee of five was appointed in the federal house of representatives

To inquire whether any secret organization hostile to the government of the United States exists in the District of Columbia; and, if so, whether any officials or employes of the city of Washington or of the federal government in the executive or judicial department are members thereof.

The committee met and examined a number of witnesses among whom were the mayor of Washington and the clerk of the circuit court of Baltimore. The former, in reply to the question as to whether he knew of a secret order called the Knights of the Golden Circle, denied all knowledge of its existence. Other witnesses were questioned in the same manner. Some admitted that they had heard of it as a filibustering organization after the style of Walker's scheme, but did not know of its existence in Washington or vicinity. In their report on February 14, 1861, the committee said:

The committee is unanimously of the opinion that the evidence produced before them does not prove the existence of a secret organization here or elsewhere, hostile to the government that has for its object an attack upon the Capital.⁶

This report, however, did not allay the popular belief that southern emissaries were quietly and successfully building up a secret society in the north which would soon be a serious menace to the government.

In Indiana, within a month after the attack on Fort Sumter, the existence of the K.G.C. was strongly suspected in Wayne and other counties, and measures were taken to counteract its operations.⁷ In July, 1861, an anonymous pamphlet entitled "*An Authentic Exposition of the K.G.C.*" was published at Indianapolis. This pamphlet, while it was written by one who claimed to be a member and created considerable comment through the press at the time, is, in most respects, worthless as an authority regarding the organization. In September, 1861, John C. Brain, a professional artist, who was wandering about Michigan City, Indiana, was arrested, charged with being a spy in the service of the rebels, and a "member of the disloyal secret order known as the Knights

⁶ *House Report*, No. 79, 36th Cong., 2nd Sess.

⁷ W. H. H. Terrell, *Adj. Gen. Indiana, Report*, Vol. I, p. 294.

of the Golden Circle." The evidence produced on his examination proved that he had made efforts to induce men to join the order. He was sent to Fort Warren and there detained some five or six months.⁸

In December, 1861, the *Indianapolis Journal*⁹ claimed that a secret society had been organized in the State of Indiana for the purpose of opposing the war and defeating all attempts to sustain it by taxation; that it was undoubtedly an offshoot of the K.G.C. organization adapted to that latitude; and that it existed in Indianapolis, Rockville, Madison, Sullivan, Vincennes, and Greencastle, as well as in eastern Illinois.

Before the middle of the year 1861, Governor Oliver P. Morton was confident of the existence of the order in the State and began a system of espionage which in 1863 and 1864 resulted in its complete exposure. By May, 1862, sufficient evidence had been obtained to justify an investigation into the character, purposes and movements of the order by the grand jury of the United States circuit court. Witnesses were summoned before the jury from every part of the State. Newly enlisted soldiers were secretly given leave of absence and sent back to their homes to become members of the lodges in order to report their operations. In many sections of the State these witnesses found castles active and fully organized. Regular meetings were being held and military drill practiced. One castle of sixty or seventy members in Brown county, was being effectively trained in military tactics. After an examination of these witnesses from the different parts of the State, the grand jury made an elaborate report in which it said:¹⁰

A secret oath-bound organization exists, numbering some fifteen thousand in Indiana, as estimated by the members of their order, commonly known as the Knights of the Golden Circle. Their lodges or castles, as they denominate them, are located in various parts of the State; yet they have common signs, grips, and words whereby the members are all able to recognize each other, and pass-words to enable the member to enter the castle in which he was initiated or any other which he may choose to visit.

⁸ *O. R.* II, Vol. II, p. 711.

⁹ *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, Dec. 30, 1861.

¹⁰ W. H. H. Terrell, *Adj. Gen. Indiana, 1861-65 Report*, Vol. I, p. 295.

After alluding to the filibustering origin of the order the report continues:

Said grand jury has abundant evidence of the membership binding themselves to resist the payment of the federal tax and to prevent enlistment in the army of the United States. In localities where the organization extensively prevails there has been a failure to furnish a fair proportion of volunteers. The meetings of the order are held in by-places, sometimes in the woods, and at other times in deserted houses; its members frequently attend with arms in their hands, and in almost every instance armed sentinels are posted to keep off intruders. The credulous and unwary are often allured into the fold of the order upon the pretext that it was instituted for no other purpose than the better organization of the Democratic party.

As a result of the three weeks session of the grand jury sixty indictments were returned, sixteen of which were for treason, eighteen for conspiracy to take and possess the property of the United States, and thirteen for conspiracy to defeat operations of the law.

This report, published on August 4, 1862, naturally excited much alarm throughout the State. The Democratic leaders at once declared that this was merely a move by the party in power to insure a Republican victory in the October elections. The Indianapolis *Sentinel*, the Democratic organ of the State, denied any knowledge of the existence of such an association and every effort was made by the Democratic press and by the party organization to counteract the effect of this report of the grand jury. The Republicans on the other hand found it a most excellent party weapon, and they did not use it lightly. The Indianapolis *Journal*, on the day the report was made public, started off with an editorial which said:

Nothing so seriously affecting the public safety of the government has been developed since the outbreak of the rebellion. A secret association exists in Indiana of 15,000 men, sworn to resist federal taxation and military enlistments, prepared by signs to recognize and assist each other and to recognize and protect members of similar organizations in the rebel army, and meeting with arms in their hands and under protection of armed sentinels. So gigantic a conspiracy is second only to the rebellion of which it is an offshoot. The grand jury has sent to places where castles of the order were believed to exist, brought to this city the men suspected of belonging to it, put them on oath and forced out of them word by word

confessions which are embodied in the revelations now made. Signs, grips and pass-words were revealed by witnesses. Some of the grand jury, in order to satisfy themselves by experiment, mixed with the crowd at the convention¹¹ on last Wednesday and the signs they had learned were recognized and returned by about one hundred persons.¹²

In his speech before the Republican State convention, which was held June 18, while the grand jury was still in session, Governor Morton warned the men of Indiana against factions and secret organizations. He declared that he had undeniable evidence from several sources of the existence of secret societies in the State of a dangerous character whose purpose was aid and comfort to the southern traitors.¹³ Republican papers published many improbable stories regarding the secret conclaves of the Knights and reported many instances of the midnight meetings of the lodges in dark and secluded places. Politicians from the governor down harped long and loudly on these evidences of "Democratic duplicity."

Assert as strongly as they might the treasonable character of this organization and its intimate relation to the Democratic party, the Republicans were unable to stem the tide of Democratic victory in October, 1862. The success of the Democrats in this election, however, can not be interpreted as a refusal on the part of the people to believe in the existence of these orders, for many adverse circumstances assisted to overthrow the Republican party. The defeat of Pope's army in the Peninsula; the absence of so many voters who had joined the ranks; the unpopularity of the draft—all were powerful influences against the administration. The Republicans hoped that their cry against this treasonable organization would overcome these unfavorable influences, but this weapon failed to have the desired effect. It was evident that the people did not accept all the extravagant statements of the partisan press and platform. A Democratic state ticket and legislature were elected thoroughly hostile to Morton and not at all in sympathy with the administration at Washington. The Republicans declared that the victory was accomplished by means of the K.G.C. organization, and that a majority of the members of the legislature were members of the society in good

¹¹ Democratic State Convention, Aug. 4, 1862.

¹² Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 206.

standing. While these declarations were extravagant and unwarranted, it is a well known fact that the members of the K.G.C. supported the Democratic candidates and that a majority in the legislature, while denying the existence of a treasonable order, sometimes admitted the existence of a secret organization whose purpose was the protection of a citizen against arbitrary arrests and against the machinations of the "Union League," a secret society whose chief purpose, according to their idea, was the enforcement of the will of a tyrannical administration.

On January 16, 1863, Mr. Thomas J. Cason, Republican representative from Boone county, offered a resolution in the House ordering an investigation into the secret political and military organization alleged to exist in that State with the object of resisting the laws of the State and of the United States. The question was laid on the table by a party vote.¹⁴ On January 20, 1863, Benjamin F. Gregory offered another resolution in the House which read:

Whereas, it is reported and believed by many loyal citizens in this State that there are many secret organizations or societies formed and being formed, intended in their character and nature to prejudice the minds of the loyal people of this State against the further prosecution of the war for the suppression of the rebellion in the land, therefore an act of justice to those against whom disloyalty is charged, as well as an act of justice to the citizens of the State of Indiana, and of the loyal people of the United States, there be appointed from this House a special committee of one from each congressional district in the State to investigate the facts in relation to said secret organizations, with power to send for persons and papers, who shall report their proceeding to this House.¹⁵

Various objections were made to such an investigation—it would be useless and expensive, no investigation should be made until facts had been discovered to prove the existence of such societies, the resolution was based upon a mere rumor originating with the abolition Indianapolis *Journal*, an investigation would embitter partisan feeling and cast a reflection upon the Democratic party, and finally, no one believed the accusations which had been made. The proposition was laid on the table by another strictly party vote.

This conduct on the part of the Democratic House may

¹⁴ *House Journal*, Indiana, 43rd Sess., 1863, p. 120.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 128.

be interpreted in one of two ways: either the majority knew little about the secret order and deemed the rumors so groundless that they did not deserve the recognition of the House, or they feared the exposure of an organization in close touch with the party in power, including in its membership many Democrats. If the former supposition be the true statement of the case then the Democratic party was playing bad politics, for a refusal to grant an investigation only fixed more firmly in the minds of the Republicans the belief that such an organization existed within the ranks of the Democratic party. The bitter opposition of the legislature to the administration of Governor Morton and, especially, to him personally, lent some color to the accusation that the House and Senate were harboring many Knights of the Golden Circle.

On January 14, 1863, at a Union meeting in Indianapolis, Governor Morton made a speech in which he gave the history of the secret societies in Indiana. On the 24th, at a similar meeting in Shelbyville, he denounced in strongest terms the K.G.C.'s. Again on February 23, at Cincinnati, he warned the people against their secret intrigues.¹⁶ He reminded them of the charge that the One Hundredth and Ninth Illinois regiment, which had been recently disbanded by General Grant,¹⁷ was a Circle and that several regiments of Indiana troops were not free from the baneful influence of the order. He urged the people to throttle the public enemies, declaring that they would speedily be brought to trial.

During this time his agents were not idle. Spies throughout the State, were keeping close watch upon the lodges and reporting every movement made by the Knights. Col. Henry B. Carrington, mustering officer for Indiana, was busily engaged in the effort to detect the operations of the secret societies in their attempt to secure desertions from the army. In a despatch to Brigadier-General L. Thomas, adjutant-general of the United States army, on January 25, 1863, he confirmed the report which he had previously sent to the secretary of war in June, 1862, that a treasonable society existed in Indiana. He stated that nearly 2,600 deserters and stragglers

¹⁶ Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 234.

¹⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 13, 1863.

had been arrested within a few weeks; that most of the deserters, true to the oath of the order, deserted with their arms; and that in one case seventeen had fortified themselves in a log cabin and were being maintained by their neighbors.¹⁸ On March 20, 1863, Colonel Carrington submitted to the secretary of war a memorandum on the condition of public affairs in Indiana.¹⁹ In this report he stated that the oath of the K.G.C. embodied three objects: securing the desertion of soldiers with their arms and the protection of these deserters; resisting further drafts and interfering with further enlistments; and stopping the war. He said that the society assumed new force and significance in December; the signs, grips, and passwords were changed; the obligations became more directly treasonable; and the organization assumed military form and purpose. A five pointed star was adopted as a sign of recognition in case the State were invaded by the rebels. Night and day signals were provided by which the members could rally to the assistance of a brother. The order had enjoined upon its members thorough arming, and during February and March alone nearly 30,000 arms, consisting chiefly of revolvers, entered Indiana. Sixteen boxes came from Lexington, Kentucky, under the guise of household goods. One box from Cincinnati was marked "pick-axes," another "hardware," another "nails." The county lodges drilled regularly. The membership of the order was estimated at 92,000, and there were known lodges in every county but seven. Plans were discussed in some of the lodges respecting the seizure of the arsenal, the railroads and the telegraphs. Several lodges made it obligatory upon the members to resist the draft. In conclusion this memorandum predicted serious violence if the tension were not relieved and the people of the State permitted to become quiet again.

On March 26, 1863, Governor Morton, who had gone to confer with the secretary of war, telegraphed to Colonel Carrington that large shipments of arms were being made from New York for insurrectionary purposes. Colonel Carrington at once issued a military order prohibiting the importation of

¹⁸ *O. R.* III, Vol. III, p. 19.

¹⁹ *O. R.* II, Vol. V, p. 363.

weapons for secret organizations and restricting the sale of arms.²⁰

Up to this time there had been little open and violent opposition to the administration, but during the spring of 1863 many acts of violence occurred not only against the enrolling officers but also against private citizens. Reports of disloyal conduct came up from nearly every section of the State, especially from the southern counties. A soldier on furlough at his home near French Lick disappeared. His friends asserted that the Knights of the Golden Circle were his murderers. A cavalry squadron, sent to Johnson county to arrest deserters, was fired upon. This also was charged to the knights. A Mr. Robe of Green township, Morgan county, was killed by Sylvester Bailey and no provocation was given except that Mr. Robe's son was a witness against the K. G. C.'s in the examination before the grand jury at Indianapolis. In the attempt of the county grand jury to ascertain who the murderer was a number of witnesses refused to testify regarding the work of the secret order for fear of incriminating themselves. On April 13 a serious riot occurred near Danville, Indiana, in which one man was killed. The riot was brought about by a crowd of mounted men wearing butternuts, presumably Knights of the Golden Circle. A farmer living in Union township, Morgan county, stated that on passing a schoolhouse in White River township at two o'clock in the morning he saw in a wood near the building a large number of horses hitched. He recognized them as belonging to members of the order in the county. Scores of similar incidents were reported through the Republican press from all parts of the State.

The highest pitch of excitement, however, seems to have been reached in an incident which occurred in the spring of 1863 in one of the back counties of the State and a stronghold of Democracy. This incident²¹ was the killing of Louis Prosser on April 18, 1863, by Captain Cuning, an officer of the volunteers. The latter, with some three or four strong union men and soldiers, had gone over to Brown county to attend a union meeting to assist in reviving the spirit of loyalty

²⁰ Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 385.

²¹ Related by W. H. Smith, Indianapolis, Dec. 28, '02, an eyewitness of the incident.

which seemed to be especially lacking in that section of the State. Prosser was the leader of the Democracy in that county and a former representative of the legislature. He was also at the head of the Knights of the Golden Circle and an outspoken partisan of the rebellion. Accompanied by a few armed followers he attended the union meeting. While Captain Cuning was speaking Prosser shot and killed one of the soldiers who was standing on the outskirts of the crowd. Captain Cuning, who saw him fire the shot, drew his revolver, fired, and mortally wounded Prosser, whose followers succeeded in carrying him away to the hills. Intense excitement prevailed. The rumor spread that Governor Morton was sending a detachment of troops to capture Prosser, dead or alive. His friends, supposedly all members of this secret order, flocked to his hiding place to protect him from arrest. The next day fifty armed men were seen drilling in Nashville, the county seat, and a company of forty armed men from Jackson and Bartholomew counties passed through the town, going in the direction of Prosser's home, with the evident intention of protecting him from arrest and removal from the county. The testimony given before a commission, appointed by the governor to investigate the affair, indicated a state of anarchy in the county and an evident intention on the part of the members of the secret organization to oppose in every possible way the enforcement of the law. Men all over the southern half of the State went armed. The *Journal* declared:

The news comes up from every part of the State that the K.G.C. are supplying themselves with arms. Immense quantities of revolvers and bowie knives are shipped from this city to Cincinnati and other parts of the State. They are sent into country neighborhoods in lots of ten to one hundred, showing that companies and societies are all being armed.²²

So frequent had these acts of violence become in some of the southern counties of the State and so many rumors were set afloat concerning supposed raids of the K.G.C.'s that whole communities were kept in a constant state of alarm and excitement. In Washington county, where the order was unusually strong, the slightest rumor of the movements of

²² Indianapolis *Journal*, March 12, 1863.

the Knights led the union sympathizers to barricade their houses or flee to safer quarters in the adjoining county.²³

Unfortunately for the general situation, the federal government was forced to resort to the draft in the spring and summer of 1863. This only added fuel to the flame. In no section of the north did this exercise of the war power create more disturbance than in Indiana. Partisan spirit, which had been aroused by the State draft in the fall of 1863, came to a white heat when the federal government asserted the right to levy upon the individual States. Protests against draft, and particularly the commutation clause, were the topics of conversation at all gatherings, and these protests soon ripened into threats of opposition by force of arms. Enrolling officers were fired upon and a number were killed. Draft boxes were destroyed, enrollment papers were burned, and vigilant committees were organized to protect men who resisted the draft. Finally Governor Morton was forced to issue a proclamation (June 11, 1863) setting forth the law regarding opposition to the draft and warning citizens of the State against infractions of that law. He took occasion to admonish the people against the unbridled license of speech which was driving many into dangerous secret societies, whose purpose was the weakening of the government and the strengthening of the enemy's cause.²⁴

Naturally, but without sufficient justification, the supporters of the administration attributed most of the violence of the times to the Knights of the Golden Circle. If a fisticuff took place in front of a rural church or a country schoolhouse the partisan press cited it as another illustration of the machinations of the secret "emissaries of Jeff Davis." No doubt members of the order were implicated in many of these outrages, but there were many disturbances with which the Knights had nothing to do—disturbances which found their cause in purely local and personal jealousies, or sprang out of temporary excitement. Men's emotions were kindled to fever heat during those days. They had abnormal feelings of

²³ Statement of Supt. E. K. Koffman, Salem, Ind., July 30, 1903. See report of Adj. Gen. 1861-65, Vol. I, pp. 278-293. Gen. Terrell here gives a long list of the outrages and riots which he presumably attributes to the K.G.C.

²⁴ W. H. H. Terrell, Adj. Gen. Indiana, *Report*, Vol. I, p. 288.

patriotism and loyalty. Their opinions were radical, and he that dared utter the slightest protest against the policy of the administration was condemned by all loyal citizens and classed with the group of offenders indiscriminately called "traitors, butternuts, and copperheads."

Coupled with the serious acts of violence cited above, and the disposition of many to cripple the hands of the administration, were other attempts on the part of the opponents of the war which resulted most ludicrously to the members of the Knights of the Golden Circle. One of these was an incident which occurred in Indianapolis known as the "Battle of Pogue's Run." The Democrats had called a mass meeting for Indianapolis on May 20, 1863. A number of prominent Democrats, not only from Indiana but from the neighboring States, were announced as speakers, among them Congressman C. L. Vallandigham of Ohio, Gov. Horatio Seymour of New York, and Sen. Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana. The evident purpose of the meeting, at least in the minds of the Democratic leaders, was a protest against the administration and the war. But the radicals and the members of the secret organizations took advantage of this meeting for an armed demonstration. Word was sent to the lodge urging them to come armed and prepared for emergencies. The understanding was that an attack would be made on the State arsenal and Camp Morton, and that the prisoners would be released and armed. Members of a number of castles obeyed the order with alacrity. Arms and ammunition were concealed on their persons and in wagons. One castle sent a delegation of twenty or more from Sullivan county fully equipped for such an enterprise.²⁵ They camped on the outskirts of the city, leaving their munitions of war hidden under the hay. The mass meeting was a large one, numbering some ten or twelve thousand, of whom probably three thousand were armed. Governor Morton was fully informed of the warlike preparation on the part of the society by his spies, who were acquainted with almost every lodge. A small federal force which was in Indianapolis at the time, under the command of Gen. Milo Haskall, together with

²⁵ Statement of John A. Spence, Aug. 3, 1902. A member of the delegation from Sullivan Co.

the union paroled prisoners at Camp Carrington, were organized and placed under command of Col. John Coburn. They were stationed about the city to protect government property and suppress riotous demonstrations. Several companies were placed at the Circle, in the center of the city, two blocks from the statehouse yard, where the meeting was to be held. A cannon was placed in position to command the statehouse.

The meeting was called to order by Daniel W. Voorhees. Mr. Vallandigham, accused of insurrection, had been arrested at Dayton, Ohio, some days before by order of Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside. This fact furnished Mr. Voorhees an excellent text for his attack on the administration. "One man there would have been in our midst today," he said, "an honored guest, one whom you all expected to see here on this occasion, but he has fallen a little sooner than the rest of us, perhaps a victim to the base usurpation which has taken the place of public rights and of the constitution."²⁶ Speeches were also made by Joseph E. McDonald and Thomas A. Hendricks. The tenor of all of the addresses was the usurpation of power and the tyranny of the State and federal officials. None of the speakers, however, advised armed resistance to the government. While the meeting was in session troops were stationed about the statehouse grounds. It is easy to conceive that they more than carried out their orders to prevent a demonstration. They became insolent, taunted the "copperheads," encircled the crowd and prevented egress, called for three cheers for Lincoln and the flag, and in various ways disturbed the meeting as only soldiers can whose sense of authority and egotism has developed more rapidly than their sense of fair play and their knowledge of the rights of the individual citizen. Their insolence increased with the enthusiasm of the crowd. About four o'clock in the afternoon, while Mr. Hendricks was speaking, some eight or ten soldiers with bayonets fixed and rifles cocked entered the crowd and slowly advanced to the stand.²⁷ This created much excitement among the Democrats. Mr. Hendricks hastened to close his remarks, the

²⁶ Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 273.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

chairman called for the report of the committee on resolutions, and the meeting adjourned. The enthusiasm of the Democrats gave way to intense anger at this interruption of a public meeting of a free people by a few insolent soldiers. Their wrath, which vented itself on the street, only added fuel to the flame, for it furnished the over-zealous soldiers with an excuse for arresting the would-be traitors and hurrying them off to the guard-house.

When the meeting was over and the trains were leaving the city a shot was fired from a car on the Lafayette or Terre Haute railroad.

The intention to create an armed disturbance now seemed clear, and the soldiers determined to give the remaining butternuts a lesson. When the Indiana Central train left the station a cannon was placed in front of it. The train stopped. A small body of soldiers was collected and a policeman, accompanied by the soldiers, demanded the surrender of all firearms in possession of the passengers. Nearly 200 weapons were given up. The train to Cincinnati was also stopped, revolvers were taken and many others were thrown by their owners into Pogue's Run at the side of the track. Weapons had been given to the women in the belief that they would not be searched. Seven were found upon one woman. A knife nearly two feet long was discovered in the stove of one of the cars. In all about five hundred revolvers were taken from those who had attended the meeting.²⁸

The ludicrous ending of the peace meeting produced a feeling of deep chagrin and anger in the minds of the Democrats whether they were connected with the treasonable plans of the order or not. Nor is this to be wondered at. No doubt the officials winked at the conduct of the soldiers who had as much to do with the bloodless battle as did the K.G.C.'s. On the following day the *Sentinel* in an editorial declared that Indiana was as completely under military rule as France, Austria or Russia, while the *Journal* glorified over the discomfiture of the traitorous schemes of the Knights of the Golden Circle.

The humiliating results of the Indianapolis peace meeting, the victories of the union armies during the summer of 1863, and the raid of John Morgan in July practically put an end to the Knights of the Golden Circle in the State. Re-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

peated statements were made at the time and afterwards that Morgan was in communication with the Knights, that they knew definitely of his plans, and that he was promised assistance by them upon his entrance into the State. The fact that there was an understanding of some kind among the Knights, to the effect that their lives and property should be protected in case of a raid into the north by a southern army, is evident from the use of the lone star which was worn by the members under the lapel of the coat and hung in the windows of their homes as a protection to their property, but there is no evidence that Morgan expected any assistance or that they knew of his intentions. Gen. Basil Duke, second in command during the raid, says that they met only two or three members of the order in Indiana, and that they expected and received no assistance from the order whatever.²⁹

The Knights of the Golden Circle were more numerous in Indiana than in any other northern State; but the number of lodges will never be known, since there was no central authority to whom reports could be sent, and minutes of the local societies were either not kept at all or were destroyed when the governor exposed the order. Lodges were evidently established in nearly all the southern counties of the State, especially in the counties of Harrison, Washington, Jennings, Martin, Daviess, Orange, and Brown. One lodge was established in Indianapolis, a number were reported from Boone, Huntington, Allen, Dekalb, Randolph, and Wayne counties. But as an association the Knights of the Golden Circle in Indiana showed a lack of close organization and accomplished little more than to bring upon its members, and unjustly upon the Democratic party, the condemnation of the supporters of the war for the preservation of the union.

The history of the Knights in the other sections of the country is of less importance than in Indiana, for that State was the storm center of such movements during the war. But public apprehension was early aroused in other States because of the threatened danger from these secret enemies of the government. Early in the fall of 1861 southern Illinois was brought to the attention of the authorities at Wash-

²⁹ Statement of Gen. Basil Duke, March 28, 1903.

ington as being a fertile field for the propagation of secession. On December 5, 1861, Secretary William H. Seward wrote to David L. Phillips, United States marshal for the district of Illinois, saying:

It is represented to this department that there is strong ground for the belief that treasonable organizations are in existence in the southern part of the State of Illinois. You will please send a proper person to that quarter to examine into the truth of the matter and in case any well-founded evidence should be discovered against any person or persons you will give notice to this department by post. In cases which will not admit of delay, however, you will arrest the person, secure his papers, and give immediate notice by telegraph to this department.³⁰

On February 23 Mr. Phillips made his report to Secretary Seward, enclosing the report of one of his assistants, A. J. Davis, whom he had sent into the southern counties of the State to make investigation. Davis reported at length concerning fourteen well known sympathizers in the counties of Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Williamson, ten of whom were members of the K.G.C. He named William Dodd of Mount Vernon, clerk of the county courts, who initiated him into the order; Henry Williams of Spring Garden, a leading citizen and member of the same castle, who had attempted to raise a company for the rebel army; Dr. Clemerson, prosecuting attorney for Williamson county, a native of Georgia, and the leader of the K.G.C. in that county. Mr. Phillips advised the arrest of all these men as "malicious and devilish enemies of the government." He thought the arrest of a few of the leaders would hold in check the treasonable element in that part of the State.³¹

In the early part of 1862 the "M. P.'s" or "Mutual Protection Society" was organized in and around Paris, Illinois. Their secrets were exposed by the editor of the local paper. A crowd of the members came into Paris for the purpose of getting satisfaction from the editor, but they found the Democrats as well as Republicans ready to protect him.³²

The political interest of the State, in the spring of 1862, was centered in the constitutional convention which sat in

³⁰ *O. R. II*, Vol. II, p. 270.

³¹ *Ibid*, 241.

³² *Daily Illinois State Journal*, Aug. 28, 1862.

Springfield. Rumors were afloat concerning the disloyalty of some of its members. The correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* wrote:

It has been rumored around for some days that there are many Knights of the Golden Circle and members of the Mutual Protection society in the convention. The number of the K.G.C. has been placed so high as to come within a few votes of a majority of the convention.³³

In order to quiet the public apprehension regarding the influence of the order in the convention a committee was appointed on February 13 to investigate the charges. On March 20 the committee reported that the rumors had no foundation. It is not at all probable that the order had any influence in the deliberations.

During the summer of 1862 the government still continued to keep a close watch on the secret organization. Marshal Phillips reported that the midnight meetings were held in various parts of the southern counties and that as many as five hundred persons had been in attendance at one meeting. He further stated that the K.G.C. claimed to have lodges in every county in the State and a membership of at least 20,000 men.³⁴ During the summer months Phillips made numerous arrests, most of which were for treasonable utterances and for membership in the K.G.C. Investigations were also made by Major Merrell, provost marshal in southern Illinois. A full report of these investigations appears in the *Chicago Tribune* for August 25, 1862, under the caption the "Cairo Expose." While the report is evidently exaggerated and the depositions printed indicate that the testimony came chiefly from men of little education, they show a widespread disaffection in the southern part of the State. Strong castles were reported in Perry, Jersey, Jefferson, Franklin, LaSalle, Jackson, and Williamson counties. Depositions were taken and members testified that they had joined the organization with the definite understanding that the object of the society was to lend assistance to the southern cause and to oppose the "abolition" war then going on. In some cases names of members were given and the membership of castles reported, varying from seventy to four hundred.

³³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb. 11, 1862.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Aug. 23, 1862.

The Carbondale *Times*, a Democratic paper, commenting on this expose, estimated the membership in Illinois at 30,000. A month later the same paper declared that it had no doubt of the existence of the order in southern Illinois, and that it believed its main purpose was to give aid and comfort to the enemies of the government.³⁵ The Illinois *Journal*, in discussing this statement, said:

The existence of an order in the south bearing the name of "The Knights of the Golden Circle" was proved beyond a doubt months ago. Its original object was the conquest of Mexico and Central America. On the election of Lincoln it became the chief instrument in fomenting rebellion against the government, and for the establishment of a Confederacy based upon negro slavery. A damning stigma upon the Democratic party is that none but Democrats joined the order. Many Democrats unhesitatingly condemn this treasonable association. Many have been seduced into the organization who, upon discovering its treasonable tendencies, have promptly withdrawn.³⁶

Nothing resulted from the "Cairo Exposé" further than to arouse the people in the southern part of the State to an abnormal sense of their danger, and to hasten the organization of Union societies (Loyal Leagues and others), in opposition to the K.G.C., and for the support of the union and the war.

The existence of this secret treasonable society in the Democratic counties and the convincing evidence that many prominent Democrats were members furnished the Republican press and platform in Illinois with most excellent material for the fall campaign of 1862. About the middle of July the Chicago *Tribune* began the cry of "traitors, copperheads, and secessionists." This cry grew more and more clamorous as the campaign progressed. No effort was spared to give the public full details of all the outrages supposed to have been committed in the name of the order. The matter occupied a leading place in each day's edition; special reporters were sent to the southern part of the State to investigate the situation, and, naturally, they made their stories as extravagant as possible. But, as in Indiana, this excellent campaign weapon failed to have sufficient force to overcome the results of the calamities in the field and the widespread dissatisfaction

³⁵ Quoted in *Illinois State Journal*, Sept. 10, 1862.

³⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 7, 1863.

with the administration. The Democrats succeeded in securing a majority in the legislature. This, to them, was a clear vindication of the party from the stigma which the Republicans attempted to fasten upon it, and to the Republicans, a convincing proof that the Democratic party was so strongly intrenched behind this treasonable secret society that the State was in danger of going over to the enemy.

The silence which followed the election cannot fail to convince the reader that these attacks on the "Peace Democrats" were in part, at least, for political effect. But this silence did not long continue. As soon as the legislature met in January, 1863, Republican papers opened fire again on the secret societies, which they insisted had a large majority in that body. The *Tribune* declared that:

The leading spirits among the Democrats (in the legislature) are for revolution in the State, and no member is now afraid to say he is a K.G.C. Your correspondent might call every Democrat in the House a Knight of the Golden Circle and they would only laugh at him.³⁷

On January 10, the same paper added:

The legislature has been in session one week, during which time the Copperheads have not uttered one loyal word, but have belched forth treason day and night.

A sensation was created in this session of the legislature by a speech made by Representative Funk, one of the rich farmers in the State. He became very much annoyed by the filibustering methods of the Democratic majority in its efforts to hamper the governor in his war policy. Mr. Funk arose one day to object to a trifling resolution and took occasion to express his sentiments regarding the Democratic opposition. "Mr. Speaker, you must excuse me," he said, "I could not sit longer in my seat, and calmly listen to these traitors. My heart cries out for the lives of our brave volunteers in the field whom these traitors at home are destroying by thousands." He then proceeded to portray the results of their opposition, closing with a bitter denunciation of these "secessionists at heart, their aiders and abettors who seek to embarrass the government and stop the war."³⁸ This speech was published throughout the north in pamphlet form and

³⁷ *The Liberator*, March 6, 1863.

³⁸ Statement of Joshua Pike, Jerseyville, Ill., Dec. 1, 1902.

widely circulated as an illustration of the spirit of the peace Democrats.

That there was very serious opposition in this legislature to the war, and, particularly to the Emancipation Proclamation, is evident, but that it was caused by the presence of members of the Knights of the Golden Circle cannot be substantiated. The influence of the order in the legislature, however, cannot be accurately estimated, since no investigation was permitted and no official notice was taken of it during the session. There were, no doubt, members of the order in the legislature who assisted in hampering the State and federal administration, but it is to be noted that at no time during these ugly days did Governor Yates seem to feel that this secret society was a serious menace to the State government. The southern half of Illinois, like the southern part of Indiana, was settled almost entirely by emigrants from the southern States, and their sympathies leaned strongly toward the south. As a result those secret societies found here a fertile field in which to develop. The total membership of the order in this State was probably not so large as in Indiana, but the spirit of opposition to the draft and the conduct of the war was quite as radical. Castles were established in most of the counties in the southern part of the State. In Cass county, the membership numbered possibly 500 with lodges located at Beardstown, Monroe, Virginia, Philadelphia, Newmansville, Ashland, and Chandlersville. In Jersey county, castles were organized at Jerseyville, with 300 to 400 members; at Fidelity, with possibly 100 members; at Paradise and Delhi with a smaller membership.³⁹ In different parts of Hamilton county lodges were found with a membership varying from 75 to 100. Castles were organized as far north as Peoria and Chicago, but in that part of the State the war spirit was so predominant that the order never at any time aroused any anxiety in the minds of the people. The indications are that the membership in the State was composed largely of the riff-raff of the Democratic party and, while they did control the local politics of a number of counties and created much uneasiness in the minds of those who are inclined to attribute power to mere

³⁹ Quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 11, 1861.

secrecy, they were at no time sufficiently powerful to get control of the State. The organization in the spring of 1863 was absorbed by its successor, the "Order of American Knights."

In Ohio, we find the *State Journal* asserting, as early as October, 1861, that agents of the Knights of the Golden Circle were working secretly in the State; that their oaths, grips, pass-words and correspondence were in the hands of the federal authorities; and that the marshal for the northern district of the State had made a raid upon one of their castles in Marion county and arrested the leader.⁴⁰ The various official reports concerning the K.G.C.'s in Ohio assert that the society was as strong in that State as in Indiana and Illinois. A careful search in that section of the State where the society would naturally have met with the most favorable reception, namely, in the Virginia military land district, settled largely by emigrants from southern States, has failed to corroborate the official statements. There were local organizations in some sections of the State whose object was resistance to the draft and to the arrests made by home guards and provost posses⁴¹ but few of these were castles of the Knights of the Golden Circle. There were riots and violence in some of the counties which rumor attributed to the Knights, but such rumors cannot be verified. The slight evidence obtainable, the arrest of individual Knights, and the rumors concerning their lodges and secret meetings, tend to substantiate the belief that emissaries of the order were sent to different sections of the State, that here and there they found a few followers, but that the number of castles was never large and their membership never included any considerable number even of those opposed to the war. The excitement attending the arrest and trial of Vallandigham in May, 1863, and his nomination for the governorship of the State can, in no sense, be attributed to this secret order. In fact, Vallandigham was not a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle. His connection with the secret opposition to the administration came with the reorganization of the order under the titles of "Order of American Knights" and "Sons of Liberty."⁴²

⁴⁰ Statement of J. W. Eyster, Georgetown, O., Apr. 16, 1903.

⁴¹ Vallandigham, *Life of C. L. Vallandigham*, 370.

In Missouri, as in Kentucky, the condition during the first two years of the war were not favorable to the development of secret political societies opposed to the administration. The opposition found no necessity for secret hostility. It was only when the federal authorities had established some semblance of order in the State that these organizations found any reason for being. Here and there were found embryonic societies, such as the "Paw Paws" in the southern counties of the State, a military band, sometimes declared to be only a branch of the Knights of the Golden Circle;⁴³ and the "Corps de Belgique" in St. Louis, a secret club organized by the resident Belgian consul, Charles S. Hunt. But these were nothing more than local clubs. The "Corps de Belgique" seems to have had for its special object the unification of southern sympathy in St. Louis and the surrounding region in aid of General Sterling Price's proposed invasion of the State. All that it accomplished was to furnish the nucleus around which was built up the more pretentious order of American Knights.⁴⁴

Iowa, in a sense, was a border State and was not entirely free from the efforts of these secret emissaries. In the fall of 1862, H. M. Hoxie, United States marshal for the district of Iowa, arrested a number of members of the Knights of the Golden Circle. This action was highly approved by the war department with the suggestion that the order was regarded by the department as "a traitorous one" and "the leading members should be arrested."⁴⁵ In February, 1863, Mr. Hoxie received a letter from a prominent citizen of Clarke county (one of the lower tiers of counties) stating that a branch of the Knights of the Golden Circle called the "Union Relief Society" was thoroughly organized in every township in that congressional district.⁴⁶ Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood about the same date received word that the Knights had been holding secret meetings in different places in Madison county and that they had a supply of arms sufficient to arm at least 300 men. Castles were reported in Decatur, Warren and Lucas

⁴² *O. R.* II, Vol. VII, p. 240.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 228 *et seq.*

⁴⁴ *O. R.* II, Vol. IV, p. 567.

⁴⁵ *O. R.* III, Vol. III, p. 69.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

counties. Governor Kirkwood wrote to Secretary Stanton in March that the order was "widely spread throughout the State" and that the public mind was in such a feverish and excited condition that a collision could be prevented only by a "convincing proof of the power of the government to preserve peace and order."⁴⁷ Both the governor and the federal officials in the State asked for arms and the appointment of provost-marshals with a sufficient force to prevent an outbreak in the southern counties. The governor, in March, 1863, issued a proclamation warning those who were seeking to array the people against the government and setting forth the punishment which would be inflicted for such criminal acts.⁴⁸ But the danger from the society did not extend much beyond the two lower tiers of counties and at no time was Iowa in danger of internal disorder. Public opinion was too overwhelmingly in favor of the administration to permit the extension of the society to the central and northern portions of the State.

We have no knowledge of the existence of the society in any of the middle or western States; but east of the Alleghenies we find evidence of attempts to organize castles. As early as October, 1861, the police of Philadelphia arrested a one-armed man named Charles Murray, on whose person they found papers containing the constitution and by-laws of the "Knights of the Golden Square." A comparison of these documents with those in possession of the state department relating to the Knights of the Golden Circle indicated that they were one and the same society. In his report to Secretary Seward regarding the documents, chief-of-detectives L. C. Baker said:

The document is copied almost verbatim from the constitution and by-laws of the Knights of the Golden Circle. I am satisfied that F— (Murray) is a member of the K.G.C. and that he has copied their constitution and by-laws.

The detention of Murray prevented the extension of the society under his direction.⁴⁹

In March, 1863, Judge Advocate L. C. Turner, received

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴⁸ L. C. Baker, *United States Secret Service*, p. 93.

⁴⁹ *O. R.* III, Vol. III, p. 75; *New York World*, Apr. 10, 1863.

information from Reading, Berks county, Pennsylvania, to the effect that castles had been formed in various parts of the county with the object of resisting the conscription and defying the laws of the United States. Detectives were sent to make investigations which resulted in the arrest of Philip Huber and three others charged with being members of the Knights of the Golden Circle. In his deposition Detective W. Y. Lyon reported that a number of lodges existed in Berks county and that they were rapidly increasing; that the avowed object was resistance to the draft and to the laws of the United States.⁵⁰ These arrests and the exposure of the order effectually put an end to their efforts in the east.

Frequent reports reached the secretary of state and secretary of war at Washington concerning the presence of agents of the Knights in various parts of the union. Even as far north as Maine they were suspected. Detroit and vicinity was said to be the center of their disloyal practices for Michigan. New York city was declared to be infested with them. These rumors cannot be verified and the fact that the government apparently paid no attention to them would indicate that they were only the suspicions of alarmists.

In concluding the review of this first of the secret orders, it is well to quote the testimony of Judge Advocate H. L. Burnett, who should have been well acquainted with the true purpose of the society and the history of its operations. In his report to the secretary of war he says:

There is no question but that this secret order was *per se*, a treasonable conspiracy. Every man of ordinary intelligence who, in view of the existence of a formidable armed rebellion in the land, subscribed to the oath of that order, first having read its ritual, was a traitor. The object of the leaders of the order seemed to be to educate the masses of the Democratic party and weld all the hostile elements of the north into bitter hatred of the administration and its avowed policy, and by inflammatory and incendiary appeals to arouse in their breasts such a degree of hostility toward the government that when the fitting time came they would be ready, at the beck of their leaders, to spring to their bloody work. Their intent seemed to be to make of this order and the embittered Democracy and malcontents throughout the land one grand, united, hostile mass, which should at the proper time be hurled against the government and its army.

⁵⁰ O. R. II, Vol. VIII, p. 524.

A review of the evidence from which Mr. Burnett draws his conclusions and the full report which he made at this time indicate that he was an advocate of a cause rather than an unprejudiced observer. The objects of the leaders were, no doubt, inimical to the government, but the mass of the membership never indicated a disposition to enter the arena on the side of the Confederacy. Their opposition seems to have been the result of strong partisan prejudice and the belief that the administration was assuming unconstitutional powers. The organization never became numerically strong enough to offer any real menace to the government. In Indiana and Illinois it did hinder materially the operations of the State and federal authorities, but even here the dangers were magnified. The order from first to last was so lacking in leadership, organization, and initiative that it could never have become in any sense a real menace to the government. And when its successor, the Order of American Knights, was established, with its more centralized control, the Knights of the Golden Circle was easily absorbed by it.

3. ORDER OF AMERICAN KNIGHTS AND SONS OF LIBERTY

The Order of American Knights, the successor to the Knights of the Golden Circle, originated in the mind of a lawyer of St. Louis, Phineas C. Wright, who afterward became editor of the *New York Evening News*, a paper which he planned to make the mouthpiece of the organization. Mr. Wright it seems had, prior to the war, resided in New Orleans. A year before the outbreak of hostilities he removed to St. Louis with his family where he entered upon the practice of law.¹ The exact date of the establishment of the new association, and the circumstances of its inauguration cannot be ascertained, but the supposition, based upon the evidence given in the testimony of the conspirators, is that Mr. Wright, sometime in the early spring of 1863, worked in conjunction with the members of the *Corps de Belgique* in St. Louis and estab-

¹ John A. Marshall, *American Bastille*, 218, 227.

lished in its place the Order of American Knights.² That he was a man of visionary temperament, a mystical romancer, and revelled in the mysterious and meaningless phrases of secret societies is clearly shown in the ritual of the new order which is decidedly turgid and rhetorical. There were five degrees in the new order—the Fourth or Grand degree being the highest degree of the State; while the Fifth or Supreme degree was the highest in the United States. Only high officials received the Fourth and Fifth degrees.³ In the First or Vestibule degree the candidate (neophyte) was taken through a sea of meaningless colloquies, after which the K.L. (Knight Lecturer) explained to him some of the principles which the order attempted to inculcate. It was this declaration of principles which furnished the military commission at Indianapolis with the best evidence that the order was in complete sympathy with the rebellion.⁴ These principles summarized are as follows:

1. All men are endowed by the Creator with certain rights—equal only as far as there is equality in the capacity for the appreciation, enjoyment, and exercise of these rights—some of which are inalienable, while others may, by voluntary act or consent, be qualified, suspended, or relinquished for the purpose of social governmental organization.

2. Government arises from the necessities of well-organized society.

3. Right government derives its sole authority from the will of the governed, expressly declared.

4. The grand purpose of government is the welfare of the governed.

5. The government designated "The United States of America" was created by thirteen free, sovereign, and independent States, for their mutual benefit, to administer the affairs of their common interest and concern; being endowed with the powers, dignity, and supremacy, and, no further, or other, which are distinctly specified and warranted and conferred by the strict letter of the constitution of the United States.⁵

After listening to these sound "State Rights" principles the candidate was asked, "How wilt thou respond to the decla-

² O. R. II, Vol. VII, pp. 627, *et seq.* *House Executive Document*, No. 50, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 519. This document contains the charges, testimony, findings and sentences of the plotters in the Camp Douglas Conspiracy; much of the testimony related to the secret societies.

³ O. R. II, Vol. VII, p. 642, testimony of Green B. Smith.

⁴ Discussed in Chapter V.

⁵ Benj. Pitman, *Trials for Treason at Indianapolis*, 1864, p. 298. This volume contains the official record of the trials before a military commission in the cases of Dodd and others. It will be referred to hereafter by the abbreviations *Indiana Treason Trials*.

rations thou hast just heard?" Placing himself in the "solemn attitude of invitation" he took the following vow:

I, — — —, fully comprehending and appreciating the declaration of principles which I have just heard pronounced, hold them for truth, to cherish them in my heart, to inculcate them among my fellows, to illustrate them, as far as in me lies, in my daily walk and conversation, and if needs be defend them with my life.

Then promising never to reveal the secrets of the written or unwritten ceremonies the candidate was advanced to the Second degree—"to the Temple where truth dwells serenely"—where he listened to a discourse on the subject of slavery, arguments which were distinctly southern in sentiment. In brief they were as follows:

The servitude of the African to the white man, imposed and regulated by wise and human statutes, and by suggestions of refined public sentiment, should promote the advancement of both races and is approved by the sanction of Divine economy.

When a people, of whatever race, shall have attained a social organism favorable to material and intellectual progress they should establish and maintain such form of government as a majority shall expressly declare and ordain.

All power resides in the people and is delegated always to be exercised for the advancement of the common weal by the express and implied terms of the ordinance or constitution. Hence any, the least, encroachment beyond the express limits is usurpation on the part of the delegate and is dangerous to the liberties of the people, since usurpation unrebuked, may become tyranny, despotism, and oppression.

Whenever the chosen rulers, officers or delegates, to whom the people have entrusted the power of the government shall fail or refuse to administer the government in strict accordance with the letter of the established and accepted compact, constitution, or ordinance it is the inherent right and solemn and imperative duty of the people to resist the usurpation of the functionaries and, if need be, expel them by force of arms.

Our swords shall be unsheathed whenever the great principles which we aim to inculcate and have sworn to maintain and defend shall be assailed.⁶

The A.B. (Ancient Brother) then demanded of the candidate a solemn vow in which he promised:

At all times, if needs be, to take up arms in the cause of the oppressed—in my country first of all—against any monarch, prince, potentate, power,

⁶ O. R. II, Vol. VII, p. 289. Pamphlet containing Ritual of O.A.K. Rare. Loaned by Wm. Dudley Foulke.

or government usurped, which may be found in arms and waging war against a people or peoples who are endeavoring to establish or have inaugurated a government for themselves of their own free choice in accordance with and founded upon the eternal principles of Truth.

His acceptance of these principles of the Temple so far advanced the candidate "from the outer darkness" as to assure the A.B. (Ancient Brother) that there was "one more votary to Eternal Truth, rescued from the galling chains of Error." The neophyte was now prepared for the instructions received in the Inner Temple. This was the "most excellent degree of the Order of American Knights," or Third degree. The instructions here were only an amplification of the principles of the Second degree regarding slavery and state sovereignty. The dogma of state rights was set forth in somewhat more positive terms than in the first two degrees. After listening to the reading of these principles, the candidate, for the third time obligated himself never to reveal any of the secrets of the order and to defend its principles with the sword, if necessary. He further promised that he would:

ever cherish the sublime lessons which the sacred emblems of our order suggest, and will so far as in me lies impart those lessons to the people of the earth where the mystic acorn falls from the parent bough, in whose visible firmament Orion, Arcturus, and Pleiades ride in their cold resplendent glories, and where the Southern Cross dazzles the eye of degraded humanity with its corruscations of golden light, fit emblem of Truth, while it invites our sacred order to consecrate her temples in the four corners of the earth where moral darkness reigns and despotism holds sway," etc.⁷

With this fitting climax to the ceremonies, the candidate, duly impressed with a full appreciation of the dignity and solemnity of the occasion, became a full fledged Knight ready to ride forth in true Don Quixote style "to do battle in the cause of Truth."

In addition to the written part of the ceremony there were the passwords, signals of danger, hails, watchwords, and the other mysterious features which characterized the numerous secret societies of the decade before the war, and attracted the attention of the superstitious and ignorant. As an expression of their devotion to the cause of state sovereignty the originators of the order adopted as their first and most

⁷ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 300; *O. R.* II, Vol. VII, p. 292.

important password "Nuohlac"—the word "Calhoun" reversed.

The political divisions of the States furnished a convenient basis for the local organization of the order which contemplated the establishment of a lodge in every township in every State in the union. The subordinate lodges in the townships sent delegates to the county, or Parent Temple. The Parent Temple sent delegates to the State, or Grand Council, which in turn chose delegates who composed the Supreme Council of the United States.⁸ The chief officer in the order was the Supreme Grand Commander who presided over the Supreme Council. Next in rank was the Grand Commander chosen by the State Council as head of the order in the State. In each county was a Grand Seigneur chosen by the delegates from the subordinate lodges. In addition to the Grand Commander, the State Council elected a Deputy Grand Commander, a Grand Secretary, and a Grand Missionary. The duty of the last named officer was the organization of subordinate lodges in the townships.

The military plans of the order were not mentioned in the published documents and were known only to the leaders in the States, to those who had received the Fourth and Fifth degrees. Members who had taken only the subordinate degrees, when placed on the witness stand before a military commission, testified that they knew nothing of a military department. They were unable to explain satisfactorily in the light of this ignorance that part of the obligation in which they promised

To take up arms against any Monarch, Prince, Potentate, Power or government usurped, which may be found in arms and waging war against a people endeavoring to establish a government for themselves of their own free choice.

They claimed that they understood by that oath that armed force was to be resorted to only in defense of their individual rights at the polls; in opposition to the draft; against military arrests; and as a counter influence to the military organization known as the Loyal League.⁹ All the offi-

⁸ *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 183.

⁹ Most of the witnesses testified to complete ignorance of the military department of the order.

cial reports which discuss the objects of the new order assert that its primary purpose was the formation of a Northwest Confederacy, as a direct ally of the rebels.¹⁰ Here again only the leaders knew of these treasonable purposes, which did not take definite shape until after the Order of American Knights was replaced by the new organization, The Sons of Liberty. No doubt, in many communities where southern sentiment was predominant, as in central Missouri and in the Ohio river counties of Indiana and Illinois, many of the members were ready and willing to aid any Confederate force which might invade northern territory; but this can be said only of the lodges in these sections of the country and not of the mass of the membership.

Phineas C. Wright, the first Supreme Grand Commander of the order organized the State Councils in at least three of the States—Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. In Missouri the chief officers were Charles L. Hunt, Grand Commander; Charles E. Dunn, Deputy Grand Commander; and Green B. Smith, Grand Secretary.¹¹ In the northern part of the State where the federal government was in control and able to quell any open opposition, the lodges grew rapidly in numbers and membership. But south of the Missouri river, particularly in the south-central and southwestern parts of the State, where the southern sentiment was so overwhelming, few, if any, lodges were established. Castles were organized in practically every ward of St. Louis, with a membership of from 50 to 150 in each. Flourishing temples were found in Ray, Charleston, Clay, Randolph, Howard, Boone, Calloway, Audrian, Henry, Lincoln, Cooper, Mississippi, Marian, Buchanan, and Montgomery counties.¹² Strong lodges were reported in Renick, Palmyra, Hannibal, and other cities in the northeastern part of the State.¹³

Arms and ammunition were purchased in St. Louis and shipped to the members in the outlying counties.¹⁴ So bold had the order become by the spring of 1864 that Provost Mar-

¹⁰ *O. R.* II, Vol. VII, pp. 244, 802.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 933.

¹² *Ibid.*, 296.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 745.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 642; Statement of Green B. Smith.

shal J. P. Sanderson, soon after his assignment to that position in St. Louis, determined to make a thorough investigation and expose what seemed to him "a secret organization most dangerous to the public peace and welfare of the government." He dispatched agents to the northern part of the State to ferret out the operations of the order there; selected agents who secured admission to the lodges in St. Louis; and sent spies into Illinois, Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio. These investigations, coupled with the confessions of prisoners who were held by the federal authorities in St. Louis, resulted in the arrest of the leading officers, twenty-four leading members in St. Louis, and some seventy-five members from the northern part of the State. From the examination of these witnesses and the sworn statements of the officer of the order General Sanderson, in June, 1864, framed an extensive report which he sent to Major General Rosecrans, commanding the Department of Missouri. This report presented a dark picture of the conditions of loyalty in Missouri and the other border States. It asserted that treason lurked in almost every county and that the intention of the traitors was to carry the entire northwest over to the enemy.¹⁵ A study of this report in connection with the testimony submitted with it, and in the light of late testimony, is found to be inaccurate and overdrawn. Colonel Sanderson's spies were not all reliable men, especially the one he characterized as the "shrewd, cool, wide-awake Yankee," Edward F. Hoffman, whose long, facetious and rather apologetic letters brand him as an unreliable witness. Some of the agents did, however, give a straightforward statement of facts in their reports, and it is from them chiefly that the meagre data regarding the order in Missouri has been derived.

The number of members in the State was estimated all the way from 10,000 to 60,000.¹⁶ The lowest estimate, 10,000, was sufficient to include the total membership.

The arrest of Hunt and the exposure of the order through the public press put a stop to its organized activities in the State. Local lodges may have continued to meet, but the order

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 628.

lost all semblance of an organized effort in opposition to the administration. Whatever plans the leaders may have had for the future, they were blighted by the timely exposure made by the government. The effectiveness of the order in Missouri was destroyed before it entered upon its first campaign.

Not until the meeting of the Democracy of Illinois at Springfield, June 17, 1863, was a Grand Council for that State formed. At the close of this meeting P. C. Wright, Supreme Grand Commander, initiated into the order a number of prominent Democrats of the southern part of the State. S. Corning Judd, of Lewiston, was chosen Grand Commander, and B. B. Piper, Grand Missionary.¹⁷

In Illinois the order partook more of a political character than in Missouri—i. e., it aimed at opposition to the administration rather than armed resistance to the government. Many of the lodges practiced military drill and carried arms; but the majority understood that they were preparing themselves to protect their rights at the ballot box, and their property against the bands of outlaws which infested the State. Lodges were rapidly organized in the southern counties of the State and usually absorbed the membership of the Knights of the Golden Circle and the Mutual Protection Society. Quincy, Illinois, was a center from which radiated the influences of the order into both Illinois and Missouri. Active and flourishing lodges were reported in the counties of Warren, Woodward, Sangamon, Adams, Morgan, Clinton, Hamilton, Coles, Logan, and Fulton.¹⁸ One of Marshal Sanderson's agents reported that the order extended over the entire State and that the leaders claimed a total membership of 80,000 for Illinois alone. Other estimates of the membership for the State varied from 10,000 to 50,000. It is safe to say that at no time did the membership of the order exceed 10,000. The exposure of the Knights in Missouri and Indiana in the spring and summer of 1863 put an end to the activities of the leaders in Illinois and led many to withdraw their support from the movement.¹⁹

The State Council of the O. A. K. for Indiana was organized at a meeting held in Terre Haute about August 27, 1863.

¹⁷ *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 542, Testimony of S. C. Judd.

¹⁸ *O. R.* II, Vol. VII, p. 278.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 277.

Mr. Wright was present and stated the purpose and plans of the order. Temporary officers were elected and a meeting fixed for Indianapolis September 10, 1863. Delegates from the different parts of the State were present at this meeting in September. Harrison H. Dodd was elected Grand Commander and William H. Harrison Grand Secretary.²⁰ Plans for dividing the State into four districts and arranging for complete military organization were discussed. At a meeting in November a committee was appointed to present plans for the establishment of a newspaper which should advocate the principles of the order in Indiana. In the meantime lodges were being established in the various counties as far north as Fort Wayne. As in other States, the membership of the Knights of the Golden Circle furnished a nucleus for the new order. This insured its rapid growth. By the middle of February, 1864, according to the report of the Grand Secretary, forty counties were organized and twenty more were in process of organization.²¹ The total membership reported to that date was 12,000. This report did not include the numerous counties from which unofficial reports had come. It is safe to say that the order soon became more widespread and more fully organized in Indiana than in any other of the border States.

The first regular annual meeting of the State Council was held February 17, 1864, at Indianapolis, for the purpose of electing officers and choosing delegates to the meeting of the Supreme Council at New York, February 22. H. H. Dodd was re-elected Grand Commander and William H. Harrison Grand Secretary. The Grand Commander delivered an address at this meeting which was ordered printed and distributed to the Parent Temples in the various counties.²² In this address he asserted that the purpose of the order was the "service of true Republicanism," by which he meant the independence of the individual States as secured by the Revolution of 1776. He declared that the great principle then at issue was the centralization of power, against which the Democratic

²⁰ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 80, Testimony of Wm. H. Harrison.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 319. This report named the following counties: Grant, Clay, Blackford, Dekalb, Harrison, Marshal, Washington, Allen, Brown, Wells, Vigo, Fountain, Sullivan, Parke, Marion, Vermillion, and Vanderburg.

²² *Ibid.*, 315; Testimony of Wm. H. Harrison.

party had been opposed since the formation of the union. He opposed the liberation of four million blacks insisting that the question be left to the individual States. He declared Lincoln and Morton's government to be a usurpation under which the people could not remain passive. He was willing to abide by the decision of the ballot box in the election of officers, but was unwilling to obey them when they exercised undelegated powers.

At this same meeting a platform was adopted which declared that:

Whereas, President Lincoln is usurping undelegated powers and attempting to establish a centralized despotism, *therefore* be is resolved that patriotism and manhood alike enjoin upon us resistance to such usurpation; that the constitution of the United States can be maintained only by adhering to the principles of the voluntary consent of its members; that a convention of the States be called to adjust the differences now existing; that the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 and 1799 embody the true exposition of the constitution, and that we will support and maintain the constitution of the United States as interpreted in the light of those resolutions.²³

The committee on newspaper reported in favor of a State organization to be called the "Constitutionalist," and all members were urged to assist in securing at least 10,000 subscribers.²⁴ The military bill which had been drafted some time before was adopted at this meeting, and provided for a division of the State into four districts—Northeastern, Northwestern, Southeastern and Southwestern—and for the appointment of a Major-General for each district.²⁵ Dr. William Bowles, of K. G. C. fame, was chosen head of the Military Department and Commander of the Southeastern District. The adoption of this military bill smacked too much of armed rebellion against the authorities of the State and the United States to suit a number of prominent politicians who had, up to this time, given their support to the order. According to their testimony they decided to have nothing more to do with the movement. In fact this military act determined the fate of the order, for it took from the movement the support of

²³ *Ibid.*, 318; Proceedings of the Grand Council

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 320.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 80; Testimony of Wm. H. Harrison.

any prominent Democrats who might have allied themselves with a purely political society. It also furnished Governor Morton with a clear proof of the treasonable designs of the leaders. Although he did not expose these designs for six months, he knew at the time every move they were making.

In January, 1864, Mr. Wright accepted a position on the editorial staff of the New York *Evening News*. He still retained his position as Supreme Grand Commander of the order which he had established and continued his active interest in its behalf.²⁶ At different times during the winter of 1863 he issued to the lodges addresses teeming with the same verbiage which characterized the ritual and smacking strongly of treasonable opposition to the administration. These addresses, however, were the expression of an individual member only. They never received the sanction of the Supreme Council of the order. Mr. Wright organized the Order of American Knights in New York, with James A. McMasters, editor of New York *Freeman's Journal*, as Grand Commander.²⁷ An effort was made to unite the disaffected elements in the East, particularly in Pennsylvania and New York, but this resulted in complete failure.

At the last meeting of the Supreme Council, held in Chicago in September of 1863, it was decided to hold an adjourned meeting in New York on February 22, 1864. The meeting was duly called and among the leaders present were Messrs. Wright and McMasters of New York, Dodd of Indiana, Massey of Ohio, Greene of Illinois, and Barrett of Missouri. On the way to the meeting²⁸ Mr. Greene and Dr. Barrett stopped at Windsor, Canada, to confer with Mr. Vallandigham, induct him into the order, and obtain permission to use his name for the office of Supreme Commander. Mr. Vallandigham became a member, consented to the use of his name for the office, and suggested some material changes in the ritual of the order. They stated to him that one of the purposes of the New York meeting was the consideration of just such alterations as he suggested.

Early in the session the leaders became convinced that

²⁶ *Ibid*, 43; Circular letter written by Mr. Wright.

²⁷ *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 519; Testimony of J. B. McMasters.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 502; Testimony of C. L. Vallandigham.

the ritual should be altered and the order given a new name. Government officials had exposed their secrets; some of the members were opposed to the idea of knighthood as suggested in the name American Knights; and many desired a modification of the principles as set forth in the ritual.²⁹ A committee, with Dr. Massey of Illinois as chairman, was appointed to draft a new constitution and by-laws for the association. The results of his deliberation and a consideration of its report by the council as a body were a slightly modified ritual, new signs and grips, and a new name for the order. Inspired by the memory of the patriots of the Revolutionary days in New York City, these modern defenders of the cause of human freedom adopted the name of "Order of the Sons of Liberty."

Mr. Vallandigham was duly elected Supreme Commander of the new order; a committee was appointed to convey this information to him, and induct him into the Supreme Council degree. He accepted the honor conferred upon him and suggested some changes in the ritual, which had not yet been printed. The most important addition which he suggested was the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, which afterwards became the lesson of the Inner Temple of the Second degree.³⁰

The printed work of the order under a new name was much more voluminous than that of the Order of American Knights; but in essential features it was very similar. The constitution provided for a Supreme Council, a Grand Council for each State, and Parent and Branch Temples in each county. The officers of the order were practically the same as those of the American Knights, namely, a Supreme Commander, State Grand Commanders, and County Grand Seigniors.³¹ A number of standing committees were provided for. The principles of the order were changed considerably in language and form, but they still maintained the principles of State sovereignty as strongly as before. The ritual consisted of four degrees—the Vestibule, the First degree, the degree of the First Conclave, and the degree of the Second Conclave. In the Vestibule

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 544; Testimony of S. Corning Judd.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 184; Testimony of Amos Green.

³¹ *Evansville Journal*, Aug. 11, 1864; Contains Gen. Carrington's full report of June 28, 1864, exposing the O.A.K. and S. of L. The constitution and ritual are given in full. This copy has been verified and corrected by General Carrington.

degree the candidate was required to give assent to a "Declaration of Principles," which was nothing more than a statement of the doctrines held by the Democratic party since the days of Jefferson—i. e., the doctrine that the federal government is one of delegated powers.

A majority of the Democrats who joined the order took only this Vestibule degree. They understood the organization to be nothing more than a Democratic club whose purpose was the advancement of the interests of the Democratic party. Nothing in the principles to which they subscribed in this degree could be construed into a treasonable design against the government. However, they obligated themselves to perform without hesitation or delay whatever was rightfully required of them by the duly constituted authorities of the society. Since the duly constituted authorities were at that time conspiring against the government the members obligated themselves to assist the conspiracy. As a matter of fact they were never called upon to do this, so they need be criticised only for taking the obligation and not for giving actual assistance, which in all probability they would never have given if called upon by the leaders.

In the lesson of the First degree the well-known compact theory was set forth much more fully than in the Vestibule degree, and the candidate was taught that:

In accordance with these principles, the federal government can exercise only delegated powers; hence if those who shall have been chosen to administer that government shall assume to exercise power not delegated they shall be regarded and dealt with as usurpers.

The claim of "inherent power" or "war power" as also "State necessity," or "military necessity" on the part of the functionaries of a constitutional government for sanction of any arbitrary exercise of power, we utterly reject and repudiate. Whenever the officials to whom the people have entrusted the power of government, shall refuse to administer it in strict accordance with its constitution, and shall assume to exercise power or authority not delegated, it is the inherent right and imperative duty of the people to resist such officials, and if need be expel them by force of arms. Such resistance is not revolution, but is solely the assertion of right.

In the next degree, that of the First Conclave, are found, in condensed form, the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798 and 1799, Mr. Vallandigham's personal contribution to

the ritual. These resolutions, however, are but a restatement of the lesson of the First degree. In the degree of the Second Conclave the candidate received no lesson; he merely obligated himself to defend the principles of the order, as already set forth in the ritual.

In addition to these four degrees there were the degrees of the Grand Council and the degree of the Supreme Council, both of which belonged to the unwritten work of the order. The general password was the same as that of the Order of American Knight, namely: Calhoun spelled backward forming three syllables, "Nu-oh-lac." These, together with the initials "S. L." and the expression, "Give me liberty or give me death," pronounced alternately with the warden of the Outer Court, admitted the member to the Vestibule.

The written and unwritten work of the Sons of Liberty as thus explained applied, in general, to the order in all the States; but each State was left to provide its own internal organization. This was consistent with the doctrine of State Rights as set forth in the ritual. The constitution and laws of the order in Indiana are the only ones preserved for us.³² Here we find an elaborate system worked out in detail, providing for the organization of the Grand Council, county Parent Temples and Castles. The State was left free to provide for its military department. In Indiana the State was divided into four districts, as under the constitution of the Order of American Knights. In Illinois the State was divided into congressional districts over which were placed brigadier-generals.

The return of the leaders from the New York meeting meant a vigorous campaign for the order under the new name. Members of the O. A. K. were not required to take new obligation. They were members of the new order by virtue of their relations to the old. The existing officers retained their positions. The Grand Secretary of Indiana, W. H. Harrison, sent a circular letter to the different county Temples of the State advising them of the changes made in the ritual and requesting them to send an accredited member of the Temple to Indianapolis for new instructions.³³ In Illinois agents from the Grand Council were sent out to instruct the Temples in

³² *Evansville Journal*, Aug. 11, 1864.

³³ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 83; Testimony of Wm. H. Harrison.

regard to the new ritual.³⁴ The leaders in Missouri opposed the alterations made at New York and refused to introduce them in their lodges, so the organization in that State remained under the old name. In Kentucky, where the Grand Missionary of the O. A. K.'s from Illinois, B. B. Piper, had organized a few castles of the Order of American Knights in the eastern part of the State during the fall and winter of 1863 and 1864, the Grand Council was organized as the Sons of Liberty with Joshua A. Bullitt, judge of the Kentucky court of appeals, as Grand Commander, and Felix G. Stidger, an ex-federal soldier, as Grand Secretary.³⁵ Mr. Stidger was at that time in the secret employ of the federal authorities in Kentucky and Indiana and joined the order for the purpose of betraying its operations to the government. He was in constant communication with General Carrington and Governor Morton at Indianapolis, and at the same time intimately associated with the leaders of the secret society in that city and Louisville. His disclosures during the summer of 1864 and his testimony before the military commission in Indianapolis in August of that year were considered by the judge advocate as the most important evidence leading to the conviction of the leaders. The character of Stidger's evidence will be discussed in a later chapter.

In Kentucky the Temples were never numerous and the operations of the order were confined to a small number of radicals in the city of Louisville, whose chief object seemed to be to secure supplies of Confederate funds from Canada.

In Ohio, the home of the Supreme Commander, the strength of the Sons of Liberty cannot be ascertained. General Carrington says that the State Council was to be established in June, 1864, and that the order was almost as powerful in that State as in Indiana.³⁶ Judge Advocate Holt, in his report, assumes that the number exceeded 80,000³⁷; and the biographer of Mr. Vallandigham says that because of the influence of the Supreme Commander lodges were organized in almost every county in Ohio.³⁸ Various other estimates

³⁴ *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 482; Testimony of A. R. Cassill.

³⁵ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 110; Testimony of Felix Stidger.

³⁶ *O. R.* II, Vol. VII, p. 339; Carrington to Potter, June 5, 1864.

³⁷ *O. R.* II, Vol. VII, p. 930.

³⁸ Vallandigham, *Life of C. L. Vallandigham*, 374.

and assertions were made concerning the strength of the order in that State, but a careful search reveals no evidence to substantiate any of these assertions. Dr. Massey, the Grand Commander of the order in that State, no doubt succeeded in organizing a number of castles, particularly in Vallandigham's congressional district, which centered about Dayton, but the war Democrats were so completely in control of the State party machinery that even Mr. Vallandigham had difficulty in being chosen delegate from his district to the Democratic national convention which met in Chicago on August 29, 1864. In the absence of more confirmatory proof, and with recent statements made by men who lived there during those stirring times, it is fair to assume that the Sons of Liberty never gained much ground in Ohio, and at no time numbered more than a few thousand members.

In fact the operations of the Sons of Liberty were confined almost wholly to the States of Indiana and Illinois. Here the bitterness of feeling existing between the Union men and the "Peace-at-any-price" opponents of the administration had become so intense by June of 1864 that federal, State, and local authorities were called upon repeatedly to quell disturbances. Robbing, stealing, and general outlawry became so prevalent in the southern sections of these States that men went armed, slept with rifles under their pillows, barricaded their houses and places of business, and in a number of cases good citizens rose in their might and without judge or jury put to death many of the outlaws.

Union men organized themselves into the Loyal League for the purpose of "maintaining the national and State governments against all enemies at home or abroad." This Loyal League was a secret military organization composed chiefly of members of the Republican party, and intended to protect the community in which they were organized against these local disturbances. The over-zealous partisan spirit of these men, no doubt, often led them to abuse the purpose for which they had banded themselves together, and to inflict upon Democrats, because they were Democrats, abuses and punishments which were undeserved. It mattered not what the nature of the opposition to the government was—it might be resistance

to the draft; a raid by a band of outlaws such as Clingman's band in southern Illinois; a drunken riot between "butter-nuts" and soldiers at home on a furlough—all were attributed to the machinations of this treasonable secret society, indiscriminately designated Knights of the Golden Circle, Order of American Knights, or Sons of Liberty; to which it was assumed all Democrats belonged. The partisan spirit among the Democrats on the other hand was just as radical. The efforts of federal officials to preserve order and suppress riots were resented by the opponents of the administration as usurpation of power. When the officers called to their assistance the armed members of the Loyal League, or Home Guards, the peace Democrats declared it to be tyranny and oppression.

The number of castles and the membership of the Sons of Liberty in Indiana gradually increased during the summer of 1864. The report of the secretary, given at the last meeting of the Grand Council of the State, held June 14, 1864, at Indianapolis, estimated the membership at 15,000, an increase of 20 per cent since February, 1864.³⁹ Thirty counties with forty delegates were represented at this meeting. Among the leaders present were William A. Bowles, Lambden P. Milligan, Andrew Humphreys, Stephen Horsey, ——— McBride, and Harrison H. Dodd. Nothing of vital importance occurred at this meeting except the adoption of a resolution giving the Grand Commander power to appoint a secret "Committee of Thirteen" to act in the interim of the meetings of the Grand Council, and exercise the same power which that body had. The membership of this committee was to be known only to the Grand Commander. The only satisfactory explanation for this extreme secrecy is, that Mr. Dodd and the few leaders realized that the treasonable conspiracy in which they were then engaged (to be related in the next chapter) would not meet with the support of the membership of the order, but that with a committee absolutely secret and select the negotiations with the Confederate agents in Canada could be carried to a successful conclusion.⁴⁰

The total membership in Illinois was estimated by the

³⁹ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 86; Testimony of Wm. H. Harrison.

⁴⁰ *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 544; Testimony of S. C. Judd.

Grand Commander of the State to be 20,000. Although the same conditions favorable to the growth of the society existed there, as in Indiana, the leaders were not so active in their missionary efforts, and the indications are that the membership increased very slowly, if at all, in central and southern Illinois. Further, the exposure of the O. A. K. in Missouri, from April to July 1864, practically ended the activities of the order in central Illinois. Chicago was the center of interest during the summer of 1864. There the meetings of the Grand Council for the State were held, and also the meetings of the Supreme Council. For some time there had existed in Chicago a secret lodge by the name of the "Sons of Illini," which was claimed to be only another name for the Sons of Liberty, but the constitution of the former club is in no way similar to that of the Sons of Liberty, and the testimony before the military commission at Cincinnati does not confirm the relationship of the two. There were, however, several meeting places of the Sons of Liberty in Chicago; and by the middle of August the membership was declared to be fully 5,000.⁴¹

By April, 1864, no well-defined plan had been developed by the leaders for violent opposition to the government. The acts of violence attributed to the lodges up to this date were of a local character and not part of a general plan. The leaders no doubt had such plans in mind, but they did not develop into realities until the Confederate agents appeared in Canada with a plentiful supply of bank notes to support liberally a movement in the rear of the federal army.⁴²

4. THE NORTHWEST CONFEDERACY OF 1864

One of the well-defined hopes of the southern leaders, from the first outbreak of hostilities in 1861 to the close of 1864, was the separation of the northwestern States from the union and either the organization of these States into a Northwest Confederacy in alliance with the south or their admission into the southern Confederacy as States. This hope found

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 640.

⁴² *The Southern Bivouac*, Vol. II, p. 572.

expression in resolutions passed by the Confederate congress; in the proclamation of General Braxton Bragg to the people of the northwest in September, 1862; in the speech of President Davis at Montgomery, Alabama, in 1863; in the frequent proposals of the southern press to separate the "Northwestern States from the Yankee government"; and the desire of the peace party in the northwest for a separation from New England if the desolating war then going on was not brought to a speedy close.¹

The three staple arguments used in favor of this proposal were:

1. The future of the northwestern States on account of their geographical position, their agricultural interest, and their blood relationship, is inseparably associated with that of the south.²
2. The Mississippi is their common carrier.
3. The unequal alliance with the east, particularly with New England, is unnatural and injurious to the western States.

These arguments had no little influence in moulding the opinion of the people of the northwest and producing, in 1863, so much active opposition to the administration that Lincoln declared to Charles Sumner in January of that year "that he feared the fire in the rear"—meaning the Democracy, especially of the northwest—"more than any military chances."³

The Confederate leaders watched with growing satisfaction this disaffection in the northwest and the open opposition of her citizens to the "severe and unconstitutional" measures adopted by the federal government. They were also fully acquainted with the existence in the border States of the secret political organizations which have been the subjects of discussion in the previous chapters.

¹ McPherson, *Political History of United States During the Great Rebellion*, 42, 303; *O. R.* I, Vol. LII, p. 1, p. 363; *O. R.* IV, Vol. II, pp. 41, 137, 179, 490. The *Richmond Whig* and other Southern papers contained frequent editorials favoring the plan of Northwest separation.

² *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 2, 1863; *Daily Illinois Journal*, July 20, 1863; *New York Herald*, Sept. 3, 1863; Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 398. *Cong. Globe*, 2nd Sess., 36th Cong., p. 794. Many Democratic mass meetings in Indiana and Illinois passed resolutions favoring separation from New England.

³ *Pierce's Sumner*, Vol. IV, p. 114, quoted in *Rhodes*, Vol. IV, p. 223.

In the spring of 1864 the Confederate government decided to utilize these hostile forces, if possible, in furthering its plans of secession. Its arms had met with defeat in every quarter; Lee had been driven back at Gettysburg; Vicksburg had fallen; the federal government had undisputed possession of the Mississippi from its source to its mouth; supplies were getting low; the difficulty of obtaining them was becoming more and more apparent; the depleted ranks of the Confederate army could no longer be filled with new recruits; the north refused to exchange its prisoners; Grant was closing in on Richmond; and Sherman was on his march to the sea. The situation was a desperate one. The only gleam of hope was a stroke in the rear—an uprising in the disaffected portions of the north, and the release of some 30,000 to 50,000 Confederate soldiers imprisoned in the northern cities. Such a movement as this would be a serious threat to the safety of the northwest, which would force Sherman to retrace his steps and so probably prolong the war until foreign recognition could be obtained.

Accordingly, in April, 1864, President Davis appointed Jacob Thompson, C. C. Clay, and J. P. Holcombe as commissioners to proceed at once to Canada and there carry out the oral instructions which they had received from him. The sum of \$900,000 was placed at their disposal, to be used in releasing Confederate prisoners; transporting them to the south; crippling and embarrassing the federal government by destroying military and naval stores; influencing the press; and purchasing arms and ammunition for the disaffected portions of the northwest, especially the secret political organizations.⁴ On April 30 Judah P. Benjamin wrote to John Slidell, saying:

We have sent Jacob Thompson and Clement Clay of Alabama to Canada on secret service, in the hope of aiding a disruption between the eastern and western States in the approaching election at the north. It is supposed that much good can be done by the purchase of some of the principal presses, especially in the northwest.⁵

On March 16, 1864, Captain T. H. Hines, who made him-

⁴ Mss. Confederate Archives, Treasury Dept., Benjamin to Thompson, Apr. 28, 1864.

⁵ *Ibid*; Benjamin to Slidell, Apr. 30, 1864.

self famous in the Morgan raid as a companion of the general in his escape from the Ohio penitentiary, was detailed by the Confederate government to the special service of assisting escaped prisoners who were willing to re-enter the Confederate service, and of urging the friends of the Confederacy in the northwest to organize and prepare themselves to render such aid as the circumstances would allow.

Captain Hines proceeded at once to Canada by way of the United States, while the commissioners went by sea.⁶ The latter reached Montreal on May 29. Mr. Thompson, as chief of the commission, sought to secure conferences, not only with the leaders of the disaffected elements in the north, but also with representatives of the administration at Washington. The conference with Greely at Niagara Falls and the almost humorous failure of his negotiations⁷ for cessation of hostilities led the commissioners to turn to the leaders of the peace party, with the hope of organizing an active and practical opposition to the war. Naturally the first man to whom they turned was Clement L. Vallandigham, who had been at Windsor, Canada, since his exile in 1863, and was now Supreme Commander of the secret order, The Sons of Liberty. Captain Hines had a conference with Vallandigham on June 9; and on the 11th of June Mr. Thompson, himself, met Mr. Vallandigham and the two discussed thoroughly the existing hostility in the border States.⁸

In this conference Mr. Vallandigham stated that the order was well organized, partially armed, and "ready to defend the principles at any cost"; that the membership was 300,000 strong, distributed as follows: 85,000 in Illinois, 50,000 in Indiana, 40,000 in Ohio, and while the number in Kentucky was not stated it was estimated as very large. He introduced to Mr. Thompson a prominent officer of the order with whom the Confederate commissioners afterward arranged for the distribution of funds to be used in "arming and mobilizing the county organizations." Thompson was initiated into the or-

⁶ *Ibid.*; Benjamin to Hines, March 16, 1864.

⁷ Much of the detailed narrative of these events is derived from the personal account of the incidents by Judge T. H. Hines, published in the successive issues of the *Southern Bivouac*, Vol. II, Dec. 1886 to March 1887.

⁸ *O. R.* I, Vol. XLIII, pt. II, p. 931, Thompson to Benjamin, Dec. 3, '64.

der. He examined the principles for which it stood and decided that only the occasion was lacking for members to arise and assert their rights. He felt that the moment had arrived when this occasion should be furnished. Holcombe was not so sanguine; while the northwest was "fermenting with the passions out of which revolutions have been created," he felt that conditions were not yet favorable for an uprising; but he urged the government not to abandon its efforts to separate this section from the United States.

Negotiations between Mr. Thompson and Mr. Vallandigham continued. A conference was held with a representative of the Sons of Liberty from Chicago, who asserted that he had "two regiments organized, armed, and eager for an uprising." Communication was had with the representatives from Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and Illinois, and July 20th was fixed upon as the date for a simultaneous uprising of the order in these states. Money was supplied to these leaders for arming the members and meeting the other necessary expenses of the undertaking.

Mr. Vallandigham informed the commissioners that in the interval he would return to Ohio and would, no doubt, be arrested, which event would give the occasion for a general uprising and retaliation by the order for the many acts of oppression which its members had suffered.⁹ He reached Hamilton on June 15, in time to be present at the Democratic district convention which was called to select a delegate to the national Democratic convention to be held in Chicago on July 20. Mr. Vallandigham's friends had supported him for the nomination in the face of much opposition, and his appearance at the afternoon session of the convention was sufficient to carry the day for him. The motion to elect him as delegate was carried amid great applause. As soon as the necessary business was transacted the convention adjourned to the courthouse yard to listen to the speech from their leader, who had been in banishment from May, 1863.¹⁰

In the course of his remarks, which were confined chiefly to an arraignment of the "unconstitutional and oppressive

⁹ *Southern Bivouac*, II, p. 505.

¹⁰ *O. R.* II, Vol. VII, p. 327.

measures of the Republican administration," Mr. Vallandigham took occasion to speak of the Knights of the Golden Circle or "any other secret society, treasonable or disloyal in character," whose purpose was armed resistance to the federal or State authorities. He declared that he did not know that any such had ever existed, but he was positive that none existed at the present time—he admitted that there were lawful political or party associations whose purpose was to strengthen the Democratic party and oppose the influence of the "dangerous, secret, oath-bound combination among the friends of the administration known as the Loyal Union League"; he knew of but one great conspiracy, that was the Democratic party, whose purpose was the overthrow of the present administration in November, not by force of arms, but by the ballot box—and he warned the men in power that there was a

Vast multitude bound together to defend, by whatever means, the exigencies of the times demanded, their natural and constitutional rights as freemen.¹¹

Much to his chagrin and the disappointment of his friends the federal authorities ignored the presence of Mr. Vallandigham in Ohio, and the occasion for the uprising in that State did not present itself. Mr. Thompson, however, did not lose faith in the project. In his reports to Richmond he assured the Confederate officials that

The rank and file in the northwest are weary of the war and eager to accept from any source relief from the existing conditions.

A decisive movement he felt would push thousands into open revolt. This, however, was not the feeling of the leaders of the Sons of Liberty. As the day appointed for the uprising approached they realized that they were not prepared for such a hazardous undertaking. They so informed the Confederate commissioners and called a meeting of the representatives of the order for July 20 at Chicago. Delegates from at least four States were present: Messrs. Dodd, Bowles, Walker, and Wilson from Indiana; Bullitt and Williams from Kentucky; Holloway, Piper, Swen, and Walsh from Illinois; and Barrett from Missouri. Captain Majors represented the Confederate commissioners with power to complete arrange-

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 330, *et seq.*

ments for the expenditure of a large sum of money in furthering the insurrection. The leaders were convinced that an uprising on the day appointed would end disastrously; so August 16 was fixed upon as a time far enough distant for the final arrangements to be perfected. An additional supply of money was furnished to the leaders, the expenses of all delegates to the conference at Chicago were paid, and a committee selected to confer with the Confederate agents across the border.¹²

This conference took place on July 22 at St. Katherine, Canada. The committee argued that the success of the uprising would depend upon a movement of Confederate troops into Kentucky and Missouri in sufficient force to occupy the attention of the northern army while the conspirators were busy in the rear. Such a movement was then under way in both Kentucky and Missouri, which removed any reason for delay on this score. The committee also urged that a series of public peace meetings in the northwestern States was necessary to prepare the public mind for the uprising. Mr. Thompson agreed to furnish all the funds needed for such meetings. Arrangements were completed for the uprising, which was to occur on the 16th of August. The general plan was to move upon the prison camps at Columbus, Indianapolis, Chicago, Alton, and Rock Island; seize the arsenals at these points; free and arm the Confederate prisoners; get control of the telegraph lines and railroads; move toward the south to the rendezvous at Louisville and St. Louis, drawing to their forces all the disaffected as they marched across the States; overthrow the State authorities; organize provisional governments; and so threaten the union cause in the northwest that Sherman would be forced to abandon his march to the sea and return to the defense of the States north of the Ohio. Such a culmination as this would give the south a breathing spell during which she could collect herself, possibly turn the tide of war and ultimately succeed in securing a favorable peace.¹³

The leaders returned to their States, if not full of confidence as to the outcome of this grand scheme, at least with

¹² *House Exec. Document No. 50*, p. 666.

¹³ *Indiana Treason Trials*, p. 113.

their pockets full of Confederate drafts on Canadian banks. Judge Bullitt, Grand Commander of the order in Kentucky, reached the Ohio with his hand-grip sagging under the weight of Confederate gold. He was met at the ferry landing at Louisville by a United States officer and placed under arrest, and shortly afterwards was transferred to Ft. Lafayette.¹⁴ During the three following days twenty-four other arrests were made in Louisville. These arrests destroyed all hopes of assistance from the order in Kentucky.

Grand Commander Dodd of Indiana and his chief colleagues, Messrs. Walker and Bowles, returned to Indianapolis also with a large sum of money, estimated at \$200,000, a part of which had already been spent in the purchase of arms and ammunition in New York. Dodd arranged for runners to be sent to the various county Temples, the officers of which should inform the lodges in the townships concerning the details of the plan. He called upon the chairman of the State Democratic committee, J. J. Bingham, editor of the Indianapolis *Sentinel*, and requested him to announce a Democratic mass meeting for August 16 at Indianapolis. He explained to Mr. Bingham the purpose of the gathering and the plans for the insurrection. The latter refused to call the meeting and advised Mr. Dodd to drop the whole matter, declaring that the revolutionary scheme was wild and visionary. Realizing the effect of the exposure of such a scheme on the election of 1864, Mr. Bingham and Joseph E. McDonald, one of the Democratic leaders, called a council of prominent Democrats of the State to discuss ways and means of putting an end to the plot and preventing its exposure by the Republicans. Congressman Michael C. Kerr, a member of the Sons of Liberty from New Albany, declared that the people in Washington, Floyd, and Harrison counties had the idea that a revolution was impending, and that the frightened farmers were selling their hay in the fields and their wheat in the stack. The members of the conference were unanimously of the opinion that the whole movement should be stopped, not only because the plans were treasonable but because their exposure would have a disastrous effect on the Democratic vote in the State election on

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100; Testimony of J. J. Bingham.

October 11. Dodd and Walker were called in and compelled to promise that they would go no further with their arrangements.¹⁴ The Democratic leaders did not report this conspiracy to the Republican officials. They had no desire to furnish the administration with a campaign weapon which could be used with telling effect. Governor Morton and General Carrington had already published a full *expose* of the Sons of Liberty in the State, giving the ritual, grips, pass-words, and some of the plans of the order, and attributing to it treasonable designs of the most diabolical character.¹⁵

Meanwhile in Illinois "peace meetings" had been called for Peoria, Springfield, and Chicago. The first one at Peoria proved a success, in so far as having a large crowd and arousing the masses in favor of peace. The second one at Springfield was lukewarm and the last one at Chicago was a failure.

The plans for the uprising had met with discouragement from every quarter; Vallandigham's return to Ohio had been ignored by the government; the order in Kentucky had been demoralized by the arrest of its leaders; the leading Democrats of Indiana refused to lend countenance to the plot; a number of the conspirators had been arrested in St. Louis; and the government seemed to be acquainted with the operations of the order in all of the States. All of these difficulties convinced the leaders of the Sons of Liberty that the time was not yet ripe for the insurrection.

Another conference between the Confederate commissioners and representatives of the State and county organizations was held at London, Canada, on August 7th. The representatives asked for another postponement until August 29, the date fixed for the Democratic national convention at Chicago. The reasons for this request were set forth in the following letter addressed to the three commissioners:

We have thought on the conclusion of this morning and feel constrained to say a few words more. We told you we could not approve the plan and the more we think about it the more thoroughly are we convinced that it will be unsuccessful. Time is too short to expect assistance, however willing they may be to assist. It will require some two days to travel back to places of residence and make arrangements about cashing drafts and procuring messengers of the right sort to go into the

¹⁵ June 28, 1864. Printed in full in the *Evansville Journal* Aug. 11, 1864.

different counties and give notice. This will require until Thursday to get the ear of our chiefs, which will give only one day to select and notify men that they are in for a perilous and uncertain campaign under men whom they know little about. . . . A movement unsupported by vigorous co-operation at Indianapolis and Springfield had better not be undertaken. We are willing to do anything which bids fair to result in good; but shrink from the responsibility of a movement made in the way now proposed, and have concluded frankly to communicate this to you. You underestimate the condition of things in the northwest. By patience and perseverance in the work of agitation we are sure of a general uprising which will result in glorious success. We must look to bigger results than the mere liberation of prisoners. We should look to the grand end of adding an empire of northwestern States.¹⁶

After due consideration August 29 was accepted by the commissioners as the final date. They insisted, however, upon no more delays. This date was considered particularly favorable for the inauguration of the revolutionary movement in Chicago—a time when the city would be crowded with visitors attending the Democratic national convention. The plan provided for transportation to that city a large number of the members of the order fully armed and equipped, ready for instant action. These were to be led by a band of Confederate officers and soldiers, who should go to Chicago from Canada by way of Detroit.

In the meantime the federal and State authorities were busily engaged in ferreting out the details of the conspiracy; Provost Marshal Sanderson was still investigating the operations of the C. A. K. in Missouri and Illinois; General Burbridge and Judge Advocate Holt were watching closely the movements of the Sons of Liberty about Louisville;¹⁷ Colonel Sweet had secret agents in the lodges in Chicago; and Governor Morton, assisted by General Carrington, was creating considerable uneasiness in Indiana by his unremitting efforts to expose the leaders.

Morton had information from New York that Walker was purchasing arms in that city, presumably for the Sons of Liberty. This information was confirmed about August 20 by a letter from New York, stating that:

Copperheads of Indiana have ordered and paid for 30,000 revolvers and

¹⁶ *The Southern Bivouac*, Vol. II, p. 567.

¹⁷ *O. R. I.*, Vol. XXXIX, pt. II, p. 214.

forty-two boxes of ammunition to be distributed among the antagonists of the government for the purpose of controlling the presidential election. Thirty-two boxes of the above have been forwarded to J. J. Parsons, Indianapolis, via Merchants Dispatch and marked Sunday School books.¹⁸

Governor Morton put this information into the hands of the federal authorities and ordered an investigation of the facts. Sufficient evidence was secured to corroborate the statements in the letter from New York and to warrant a search of the private office of Mr. Dodd, the Grand Commander of the Sons of Liberty. The provost marshal found there thirty-two boxes containing some 360 to 400 navy revolvers and 135,000 rounds of ammunition; about two bushels of the rituals of the Sons of Liberty; a roll of the members of the order in Indianapolis; and considerable correspondence between Mr. Dodd and prominent Democrats in the west.¹⁹

All this information was made public, and the excitement aroused by the exposure led the Indianapolis *Journal* to call a meeting of the people in the governor's circle for the evening of the 22nd, "to consider the present aspect of political affairs in the State."²⁰ This meeting was, of course, a Republican gathering. Resolutions were adopted expressing the alarm of the citizens at the threatening danger from secret orders and condemning the Democratic party for its alliance with these enemies of the government. Governor Morton was present and in a rousing speech added to the excitement of the occasion by declaring that the arms and ammunition seized on the preceding Saturday were but a drop in the bucket compared to the immense quantities that had been imported into the State in a similar manner during the past twelve or eighteen months.²¹ He was confident that the Confederate authorities were furnishing the money for the supplies and were using the Sons of Liberty for the purpose of stirring up civil war in the northwest. Nor did he let the Democratic party escape a severe flaying at his hands.

Look at the composition of the Democratic State ticket now before the people. Five men upon it are members of the Sons of Liberty—one-half of

¹⁸ Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 408.

¹⁹ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 119; Testimony of Col. A. J. Warner.

²⁰ *O. R. I.*, Vol. XXXIX, pt. II, p. 295; Indianapolis *Journal*, Aug. 22, 1864.

²¹ Chicago *Tribune*, Aug. 26, 1864.

the whole ticket. This secret order is but the nucleus; it does not embrace all the traitors, nor indeed the principal ones. It probably embraces the greater part of the rank and file of those who are willing to go into this movement, but the men who expect to reap the fruit of this revolution, these it does not include.²²

So severe was his arraignment of the Democratic candidates on the State ticket that they were forced to publish a denial of membership in the order or of any knowledge of any conspiracy against the State or federal government.

The campaign of 1864 was at its height just at this time and no better ammunition could have been furnished the Republicans than the evidence of a deep-rooted conspiracy against the federal government. Governor Morton, who was a candidate for re-election, made the most of it in his debates with McDonald, the Democratic nominee for governor. He lost no opportunity to attack the secret societies. At Lawrenceburg he again spoke of the seizure of arms belonging to the Sons of Liberty at Indianapolis; and that while McDonald was not a member of the order, he had been nominated by it, and was associating with five of its members on the State ticket. The Republican speakers and press all over the State took advantage of the conspiracy to insure a Republican victory at the polls in October.

This exposure at Indianapolis was another serious blow to the plans of the conspirators, but it was not sufficient to put a stop to the preparations for the insurrection August 29. Mr. Thompson expressed his confidence in the favorable outcome of the movement. In his communication to Mason and Slidell, August 23, 1864, he said:

I am addressing every energy that is practicable and reasonable to assist the northwestern people and everything justifies the belief that success will ultimately attend the undertaking. In order to arouse the people political meetings, called "Peace meetings," have been held and inflammatory addresses delivered and whenever orators have expressed themselves for peace with the restoration of the union, and if that can not be, then peace on any terms, the cheers and clamor of the masses have known no bounds.²³

The Confederate commissioners completed their arrange-

²² Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 411.

²³ *The Southern Bivouac*, Vol. II, p. 509; Thompson to Mason and Slidell, Aug. 23, 1864.

ments for the insurrection. Captains John B. Castleman and Thomas H. Hines were appointed by Mr. Thompson to lead the expedition against the United States prisons in the northwest. They selected a detail of some sixty Confederate soldiers, then in Canada, including Colonel G. St. Leger Grenfell, at one time Morgan's chief of staff; Colonel Vincent Marmaduke of Missouri; Colonel Benjamin Anderson of Kentucky; and Captain Cantrill, formerly of Morgan's command. They understood that they were to co-operate with the Sons of Liberty, who should gather ostensibly to stand the Democratic convention; free the prisoners during the confusion of the convention; and then inaugurate the revolution which would spread rapidly over Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.²⁴

Neither the Sons of Liberty nor the Confederate commissioners took into account the presence of spies in their midst. State and federal officials were in close touch with the movements of the secret order. Colonel Sweet, who was in command of Camp Douglas, received information of the intended attack on the camp, reinforced the garrison and sent United States Detective Thomas H. Keefe to Canada to accompany secretly the Confederate soldiers to Chicago.²⁵

On the 27th and 28th of August the detail of Confederate leaders reached the city in small parties, "assuming the appearance and conduct of men attracted by the political interest of the occasion." Other Confederates came from the south through Indiana and Illinois. The 29th of August found the city crowded with Democrats from all the northern States. Among them were the leaders of the Sons of Liberty, who were there to attend not only the national convention, but also a meeting of the Supreme Council of the order. The *Chicago Tribune* of August 27 said:

The city is full to overflowing already with the gathering clans of Copperheads, Butternuts, O.A.K.'s, Sons of Liberty, original peace men, gentlemen from Canada, Fort Lafayette graduates, and border rebels under military parole; all assembling for the last time under the soiled banner of Democracy to put in nomination the last Democratic presidential candidate. Dick Dodd, Grand Commander of the Sons of Liberty in Indiana, made his appearance yesterday. It is not known how many of his mid-

²⁴ *O. R. I.*, Vol. XLV, pt. I, p. 1077, Report of Col. Sweet.

²⁵ William Bross, *Sketch of Col. J. B. Sweet*, 17.

night assassins accompanied him, but it is generally known that a large number have been regularly detailed for duty at the Chicago convention.

The headquarters of the Sons of Liberty and the Confederate officers was the Richmond hotel, at the corner of Lake street and Michigan avenues. Over their suite of rooms was the sign, "Missouri Delegation."²⁶

The Sons of Liberty were opposed to the nomination of McClellan for President and favored Governor Seymour of New York. Their policy was to pack the convention with Seymour delegates, nominate him, and adopt a radical peace platform.²⁷ They had two meetings of the leaders at the Richmond hotel during the convention. Mr. Vallandigham, Supreme Commander of the order, presided. In a speech he said that he had come to Chicago expecting a repetition of the Charleston convention—a split in the party—but since his arrival he had changed his opinion. Instead of discord he found a wonderful unanimity of feeling and oneness of ideas. He advised the nomination of McClelland and the united action of all Democrats for his election.²⁸

The "peace Democrats" in the northwest had a strong following in the convention and Vallandigham, their leader, secured the incorporation of a plank in the platform demanding a cessation of hostilities and a convention of States in order to restore "peace on the basis of the federal union."²⁹ But the order of the Sons of Liberty, of which the same leader was the Supreme Commander, was in such a minority in the convention that from the beginning their influence amounted to little. On the second day Mr. Olds, a delegate from Ohio, suggested that the Sons of Liberty might have a communication to make to the convention, but he did not press the matter, and the suggestion was ignored by the chair.³⁰ There was a rumor that Governor Seymour and other leading Democrats had a conference with Mr. Vallandigham and insisted upon an abandonment of the conspiracy, to which the latter

²⁶ *Everybody's Magazine*, Jan., 1900, p. 85,—Personal account by Col. Thos. H. Keefe.

²⁷ Statement of H. H. Dodd, March 16, 1903.

²⁸ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 149; Testimony of James B. Wilson.

²⁹ Rhodes, *History of the United States*, Vol. IV, p. 523.

³⁰ *New York World*, Aug. 31, 1864.

consented with reluctance. This rumor, however, cannot be verified.

On the night preceding the convention the Confederate leaders called a meeting of the officers of the Sons of Liberty, assured them that their part of the plans were complete, and informed them that the 8,000 Confederate prisoners in Camp Douglas were ready to co-operate in the revolutionary movement. They requested definite information from these officers concerning the strength of the armed force which the representatives of Mr. Vallandigham had agreed to provide. Much to their disgust they soon learned that these officers of the secret order had failed to carry out their part of the agreement and had not properly informed the members in the county Temples. They found that those who had come to Chicago were totally without organization and initiative. They deemed it necessary to adjourn the conference to the evening of August 29 in order to give these officers time to collect their scattered forces and report the actual number under their control. When the Sons of Liberty, then in the city, learned that the order was to meet with no consideration at the hands of the national convention, and that heavy reinforcements had arrived at Camp Douglas, they became demoralized. It looked too much like a struggle to these valiant knights. As soon as they met with the Confederate leaders on the 29th the latter realized that these men were not the material out of which soldiers are made and that the attack on Camp Douglas would have to be abandoned. As a last resort they proposed that the Sons of Liberty supply Hines and Castleman with a force of 500 men to capture the arsenal and free the prisoners at Rock Island. They argued that so small a force could quietly take possession of a passenger train leaving Chicago at 9 p. m., and, by cutting the telegraph wires, could reach Rock Island without their presence being known to the federal authorities. But this again smacked too much of real danger to suit the taste of the wary chieftains who had been so courageous while the Confederate money was being supplied to them so lavishly. Realizing that all prospects of ~~an~~ uprising in the northwest were at an end, at least for the

present, most of the Confederate veterans returned to Canada or to the southern States through Illinois and Indiana.

Viewing the situation from this distance the question arises: What was there in the condition of things to warrant the hope of carrying out such an extensive conspiracy? In the first place, as has been stated, the Confederate commissioners knew of the serious disaffection existing in the northwest, particularly along the Ohio river. They also knew that at this time there were nearly 30,000 Confederate soldiers in prisons located in the States of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois; and that these prisoners were guarded by only 5,000 or 6,000 federal soldiers, most of whom belonged to the Veteran Reserve Corps, and were wholly ineffective for active service.³¹ The release of such an army of well-seasoned troops in the midst of a disaffected country, they felt confident, would turn the tide of war in their favor. At least in the desperate straits then confronting them the Confederacy could not lose by the attempt.

But they put too much confidence in the statements of the leaders of the Sons of Liberty. They failed to estimate correctly the character of these men and their followers. They did not realize that the secret order was sadly lacking in organization and capable leadership. It was true beyond a doubt, as Holcombe said, that these States were "fermenting with the passions out of which revolutions are created,"³² but the fermentation had not reached a stage in which it could seriously affect the entire northwest. The attempt to inaugurate a counter revolution was destined from the beginning to be a fiasco. The Confederate commissioners failed to estimate the deep undercurrent of loyalty which permeated the great northwest.

5. TREASON TRIALS IN INDIANA

The results of the Chicago convention cleared the air considerably and convinced the peace Democrats and, particu-

³¹ *O. R.* II, Vol. VIII, p. 996, contains August report; Prisoners distributed as follows: Camp Douglas, 7,000; Rock Island, 8,000; Alton, Ill., 1,200; Camp Chase, Ohio, 5,000; Camp Morton, 5,000; Johnson Island, 2,500.

³² *New York Herald*, July 31, 1872, Holcombe to Benjamin.

larly, the Sons of Liberty that they could not count on the sympathy of the Democratic party. Their chief support was gone and the order now dwindled into impotency. Only here and there did it show any animation or desire to continue its opposition to the administration and the war. As far as menacing the government of the States of the northwest was concerned the danger, which had never been formidable, was entirely gone, and the authorities might have looked upon the operations of these revolutionary agitators as a huge farce. But these operations supplied campaign material of such excellent quality that it could not be disregarded by the Republican campaign managers. The arrest and trial of the leaders in the closing weeks of the campaign supplied the Republican press and speakers with additional damaging evidence against the Democratic party.

Mr. Dodd returned to Indianapolis after the convention declaring that the charges of conspiracy made against the Sons of Liberty were without foundation. He urged the people to withhold judgment until the charges were substantiated.¹ A few days later he published an address in pamphlet form, written by Walker, and under the imposing signature of the supposed "Committee of Thirteen," in which he asserted that the charges were "absolutely and wickedly false."

Whatever may be the views and wishes of individuals, the object charged is not comprised in the purpose of the organization. A Northwestern Confederacy, it is true, is not an impossibility, but its establishment would be the effect rather than the object of an uprising of the people: an event which the continuance of the acts of tyranny of the party in power will certainly produce.²

In this address Dodd seriously implicated the Democratic party by declaring that

The immediate purposes of the Sons of Liberty and the Democratic party were identical.

Mr. Dodd was arrested some time about the 7th of September, 1864, by Gen. Alvin P. Hovey. Between that date and October 10 a number of arrests were made, including the four major generals of the Sons of Liberty, William A. Bowles,

¹ *Indianapolis Sentinel*, Sept. 5, 1864.

² Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 414.

Andrew Humphreys, Lampdin P. Milligan, and Stephen Horsesey; the deputy Grand Commander, Horace Heffren, and the Grand Secretary, William H. Harrison. J. J. Bingham, editor of the *Sentinel*, and a number of lesser lights in the party were also arrested.

On September 17 General Hovey appointed a military commission to try Dodd for conspiracy. The commission met on September 22 in Indianapolis, with Judge Advocate Major H. L. Burnett as the prosecuting attorney for the government. The council for the defense objected to the jurisdiction of the court, insisting that the civil courts were open and that the State was not under martial law—a condition necessary to the jurisdiction of a military court.³ Mr. Burnett defended the jurisdiction of the military tribunal by claiming that martial law was declared when the President issued his proclamation of September 25, 1862, subjecting all aiders and abettors of the existing insurrection to martial law. The objections of the defense were overruled, and on the 27th of the month the judge advocate presented five charges against Mr. Dodd, as follows:

1. Conspiracy against the government of the United States.
2. Affording aid and comfort to the rebels against the authority of the United States.
3. Inciting insurrection.
4. Disloyal practices.
5. Violations of the laws of war.

Under these charges were various specifications, which were in substance as follows:

Membership in the secret societies known as the Order of American Knights and Sons of Liberty, whose purpose was the overthrow of the government; holding communication with the enemy; conspiring to seize munitions of war stored in the arsenals and to free the rebel prisoners in the north; and attempting to establish a Northwestern Confederacy.⁴

To all of these charges the accused pleaded not guilty and the examination of witnesses began at once. Much to the surprise and consternation of Mr. Dodd, the first witness introduced by the government was none other than Felix G. Stidger,

³ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

former Grand Secretary of the order in Kentucky, with whom Dodd had frequently conferred, and in whom he had placed implicit confidence, never suspecting that he was a government detective. Mr. Stidger related the entire history of his connection with the Sons of Liberty; his efforts to prevent them from suspecting his true character; his frequent conferences with the leaders; and a full explanation of the unwritten work of the order. He testified that he had attended a number of meetings of the Grand Council in Indiana and Kentucky; that he was present at one of the meetings in Indianapolis in June, 1864, when all the accused were there; that they all agreed to the murder of United States Detective Coffin, who had divulged the secrets of the order; that the council voted to complete the military organization of the State as soon as possible; that Mr. Dodd had divulged to him all the details of the plans for the uprising which had been agreed upon in Chicago; and that Dr. Bowles had discussed with him the military plans of the order.⁵

Mr. Stidger was the principal witness for the government and he gave some damaging first-hand testimony, but his evidence concerning the grand conspiracy was merely a repetition of what Mr. Dodd and Judge Bullitt had told him. Furthermore, Mr. Stidger detailed at length a conference which he had with Mr. Heffren, who was afterward tried for treason and conspiracy. Heffren later turned state's evidence and, in a seemingly truthful story of his relations to the order, denied ever having met Stidger. The judge advocate cross-questioned Mr. Heffren on this point closely, but failed to convince the latter that he had met Mr. Stidger. The council for the defense cross-examined Mr. Stidger at great length on this same point, but all that we have of the examination is the following statement by the official stenographer:

A lengthy cross-examination here took place, but no additional facts were elucidated.⁶

This explanation is not made in order to minimize the value of Mr. Stidger's testimony, but merely to give it its true perspective. It is interesting to note in this connection that

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

in the official report of the trials at Indianapolis the cross-examinations were seldom published, particularly those of government witnesses. This is not proof positive that the authorities desired to give the public only that part of the evidence which portrayed the accused and the organization in the worst possible light, yet the reader of the trial proceedings is led to wonder if that is not the case.

Mr. Stidger's testimony was followed by that of several others. Joseph Kirkpatrick, of New York, testified to the sale of the arms which had been found in Mr. Dodd's office and to a contract for 2,500 more revolvers and 135,000 rounds of ammunition.⁷ William Clayton related the history of the order in Illinois, and told of the military organization and the plans for the uprising in the northwest.⁸ Wesley Tranter testified that he had been a member of the order, but that when he learned its treasonable purposes he determined to expose it; that he knew of the importation of arms into the State for the purpose of aiding the rebels; that the leaders of the order had arrangements made for murdering Governor Morton; and that they were in constant communication with the rebels.⁹

At the opening of the court on October 7 the commission was furnished with a great surprise. The judge advocate arose and said that the accused, Mr. Dodd, had escaped from confinement and therefore could not be produced in court. According to the report of Colonel Warner, who was in charge of the prisoner, Dodd had made his escape from his quarters in the third story of the postoffice building by means of a rope which had been conveyed to him by some of his friends. No serious effort was made to recapture him and, as afterwards learned, he leisurely made his way to Canada.¹⁰

The Republicans found in this incident another proof of the treasonable character of the accused, of the order which he represented, and especially of the party to which he belonged. Occurring only four days before the State election, it furnished an excellent climax to an already exciting campaign.

⁷ *Ibid* 38.

⁸ *Ibid*, 41.

⁹ *Ibid*, 49.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 50.

In the Indianapolis *Journal* Colonel Carrington published an address, in which he declared:

The exposure of the Sons of Liberty has been made. Every word is true. Harrison H. Dodd, Grand Commander of Indiana, has been on trial. Proof was overwhelming. Night before last he escaped from the third story window by a rope. Only one man was in the room with him. That man was Joseph J. Bingham. Innocent men do not do so. The act confesses the guilt. Not one-fourth of the testimony had been offered before Dodd fled. I am no politician. I know from two years' labor what this secret order means. Citizens, every day shows that you are upon the threshold of revolution. You can rebuke this treason. The traitors intend to bring war to your homes. Meet them at the ballot box while Grant and Sherman meet them in the field.¹¹

The Democratic press, on the other hand, saw in the escape of Dodd an effort of Governor Morton to

Get up a show conspiracy against the government, to be exposed upon the eve of the election, and afford a fund of political claptrap to assist the Republicans in carrying the State.¹²

The Indianapolis *Sentinel* hinted that Dodd was in complicity with Morton, and the Cincinnati *Enquirer* wondered how Mr. Dodd contrived to escape to Canada when the State was so crowded with spies and secret policemen, every one of whom knew him.¹³

The judge advocate rested the case against Dodd and asked for an adjournment, during which time he wished to prepare the papers for the prosecution of other prisoners. In October the commission met again and the judge advocate submitted the case of Dodd and asked the commission to proceed to its finding and sentence. Arguments were made on both sides. The counsel for the defense maintained that martial law did not then exist in the State of Indiana, and that, therefore, the military tribunal had no jurisdiction. Further, that the evidence offered before the court was principally hearsay and totally insufficient to prove the accused guilty of treason and conspiracy.

Mr. Burnett, in his reply, argued that when General Hovey convened the commission within the limits of his juris-

¹¹ Indianapolis *Journal*, Oct. 8, 1864.

¹² Chicago *Times*, Oct. 22, 1864.

¹³ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 340. Contains open letter by Mr. Dodd, denying all complicity with the administration party and exonerating the Democratic leaders from any connection with the "Dodd Conspiracy".

diction with orders to try the case of Dodd, he, by virtue of his military power as the representative of the commander-in-chief of the army of the United States, suspended the civil law and put in operation the military or martial law. As to the evidence given under oath, Mr. Burnett asserted that

It was of such a character that no argument of the counsel, or finely drawn sophistries can change the perilous and treasonable nature of the circumstances testified to. The proof shows that there exists in this State an organization numbering from fifty to eighty thousand men, military in character, and about two-thirds armed, ready at any time to be called out to obey the orders of their superiors, regardless of the law and authority of the United States.¹⁴

After a brief deliberation the commission found Dodd guilty on all the charges and specifications and sentenced him to be hanged at such time and place as the commanding general of the district should designate. The finding and sentence were later approved by the judge advocate general, but Mr. Dodd's escape to Canada made it impossible to carry them into effect.¹⁵

When the commission met again, October 21, the judge advocate preferred the same charges against William A. Bowles, Andrew Humphreys, Horace Heffren, Lambdin P. Milligan, and Stephen Horsey, as against Dodd.¹⁶ In this second trial the accused and the public were furnished several surprises. J. J. Bingham, Dr. James B. Wilson, and William H. Harrison, who were under arrest, were released on condition that they testify as witnesses for the government. Their testimony was by far the most important given before the commission. They related in detail their connection with the secret societies. Harrison verified the documents and reports which had been seized in Mr. Dodd's office; stated that he knew of the plans for the insurrection and the presence of arms in the city for that purpose; admitted that he was employed as Grand Secretary of the Sons of Liberty at a salary of \$800 a year; and that he destroyed the records of the order when the plans were exposed by General Carrington.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-71.

¹⁵ *O. R.* II, Vol. VII, p. 1214.

¹⁶ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 74.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90 *et seq.*

Mr. Bingham related the facts in connection with Dodd's request for the call of a Democratic mass meeting, August 16; the effort of Democratic leaders to put a stop to the proposed uprising; denied any knowledge of the military department of the organization and declared that he had taken no part in the operations of the order after the meeting, February 16, 1864, when he became convinced that it was all a "humbug."¹⁸

Dr. Wilson testified at length regarding the meeting of the Supreme Council at Chicago, July 20. He told of the plans for the uprising as agreed upon there; the presence of Confederate agents in that council; the distribution of Confederate funds to carry out the insurrection; and also of the Supreme Council meeting in Chicago during the Democratic convention when Mr. Vallandigham was present and spoke in favor of accepting McClellan as the Democratic nominee for the Presidency.¹⁹

The greatest surprise of the trial was the release of Horace Heffren, who turned state's evidence and appeared as a witness for the government. He explained the relations of the two departments of the order—the civil and military; stated that Mr. Bowles was commander of the military department in the State; had worked out an elaborate system for organizing companies of infantry, lancers, and artillerymen; admitted that he was Grand Seignior of the Temple in Washington county which embraced 1,000 to 1,100 members; but claimed that he had severed his active connection with the order after the Grand Council meeting in Indianapolis in February, 1864; and told of the military plans for the insurrection on August 16, adding that Governor Morton was to be seized and held as hostage for those engaged in the uprising who might be taken prisoners. James S. Athon, secretary of State and a member of the Sons of Liberty was to be made governor. The insurrection failed, he said, because of the prompt action on the part of Messrs. Kerr, McDonald, and other Democratic leaders.²⁰ Fifty-two other witnesses were examined concerning the order in various parts of the State,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98 *et seq.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 145 *et seq.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123 *et seq.*

and the connection which the accused men sustained to its operation. A careful reading of the testimony as reported by the official court stenographer and afterward published in book form by him furnishes ample proof of the statement made by the attorneys for the defense that the evidence of some of the leading witnesses for the State was full of inaccuracies, that it was chiefly hearsay, and that the reputation of the witnesses themselves for truth and veracity could be fairly questioned. Whole pages are devoted to the effort of proving general bad character of these witnesses.

The examination of witnesses was completed, November 25, and the court adjourned until December 6, to allow the counsel time for the preparation of their final arguments.²¹

When the commission met on the 6th, Jonathan W. Gordon, counsel for Dr. Bowles and Mr. Humphreys, discussed at great length, the question of the jurisdiction of the court. He quoted extensively from English and American sources in his efforts to define martial law. He denied the right of the President to proclaim such law and declared that it did not exist in Indiana and that, therefore, the military court could not entertain jurisdiction in the case.²²

Martin M. Ray continued the argument for the defense confining himself chiefly to the question, whether or not the Sons of Liberty was a conspiracy, *per se*. He asserted that no interpretation of the written work of the order could justify such a charge. The fact that those men held to the abstract doctrine of state sovereignty as embodied in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 and 1799 was not sufficient to justify their arrest on the charge of conspiracy. He did not deny the military feature of the order nor "that a few desperate men of that branch in and out of the State sought to precipitate the order into a revolution," but he did deny the complicity of his clients, Messrs. Humphreys and Bowles, and the mass of the membership of the Sons of Liberty, in this conspiracy.²³

John R. Coffroth then spoke in defense of Lambdin P. Milligan, reviewing the five charges against the accused. He

²¹ Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 425.

²² *Indiana Treason Trials*, 219 *et seq.*

²³ *Indiana Treason Trials*, 224 *et seq.*

asserted that Mr. Milligan's political views, his opposition to the policies of the administration, and his sympathy for the northwest were shared by men of all parties who felt that her interests had been made to pay tribute to New England. He attacked savagely the testimony of the government witness, describing Horace Heffren as that "mud-sill of infamy, who turned informer to purchase his own release." Of Tranter, Teney, and Robertson he said, "a case must be desperate, indeed, which relies for support on the testimony of such witnesses," and of Zumro he declared that in every statement he was impeached by respectable witnesses.²⁴

The Judge Advocate, in his extended reply to these arguments of the counsel for the defense, maintained the jurisdiction of the court on the ground of the President's proclamation and the necessity of the crisis. Speaking concerning the latter point he said:

It has been proved beyond question that a conspiracy more extended, more perfect in its organization, and more damnable in its design never was concocted or brought into existence under any government since governments were first instituted. It has been proved that this conspiracy existed in almost every town and county of the State; and not only in this State but in the States of Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, and Ohio; that it was thoroughly organized and partially armed; that all the objects contemplated by the order were illegal, treasonable, and damnable; that its lurking venom permeated all grades of society. . . . The danger from this conspiracy was imminent, requiring prompt action, and a strong and vigorous arm; that there was an overpowering necessity for military interference on the part of the government.²⁵

Concerning the general purposes of the order, the judge-advocate said:

The proof most clearly demonstrates that the common design of the order was to reorganize the government on the same principles which were the foundation of the present rebellion, and are the cardinal principles of the Confederate government. . . . The order was political in its character only so far as it intended and did attempt to educate the masses of the Democratic party up to this belief.²⁶

After a brief consultation the commission found all four of the accused guilty of the charges preferred against them.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 238 *et seq.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 266.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 273.

Bowles, Milligan, and Horsey were sentenced to be hanged "at such time and place as the commanding officer of the district shall designate."²⁷ Humphreys was to be confined at hard labor during the war, but his sentence was afterward commuted on condition that he would confine himself within the limits of Wright and Stockton townships, Greene county, Indiana, during the remainder of the rebellion.²⁸ These sentences were approved by President Johnson and the execution of the three prisoners was set for May 19, 1865.²⁹ In the meantime they were confined in the military prison at Columbus, Ohio. Three days before the time fixed for the execution President Johnson commuted the sentence of Horsey to life imprisonment and postponed the date of execution for Bowles and Milligan to June 2.³⁰

Meanwhile the three prisoners presented petitions to the United States circuit court for the district of Indiana, to be discharged from unlawful imprisonment, claiming that they were not, when arrested, in the military or naval service of the United States, and, therefore, were not subject to the jurisdiction of the military tribunal.³¹ They prayed to be turned over to the proper civil tribunal, to be proceeded against according to the law of the land, or discharged from custody altogether.³² The circuit court certified to a difference of opinion between the two judges on the question of the jurisdiction of the military commission and the cases were taken to the supreme court of the United States for decision.

The friends of the accused exerted every effort to secure pardons for the prisoners, but the President steadfastly refused their requests. Instructions were sent to General Hovey from the war department to pay no attention to writs from any civil court but to carry out the sentence decreed by the commission, unless otherwise ordered by the authorities at Washington. Preparation was made for the execution of the orders. The gallows were erected on the parade grounds by Confederate prisoners from Camp Morton.

²⁷ *O. R.* II, Vlo. VIII, 10, 548.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 548.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 587.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 897.

³² *Ex parte* Milligan, 4 Wallace 2.

As the date set for the execution approached, the conservative Republicans realized the gravity of the situation. Governor Morton conferred with Judge David Davis of the supreme court, who was confident that the military court was illegal because martial law did not exist in Indiana, and the civil courts were open. The governor at once wrote to President Johnson, recommending a commutation of the sentence to life imprisonment. Later, he sent other urgent requests, reiterating the recommendations in his first letter. One of these requests was carried to Washington by Mrs. Milligan. Finally, Governor Morton despatched John W. Pettit, speaker of the Indiana house of representatives, to the capital to protest against the execution of the prisoners. After two lengthy conferences he succeeded in securing commutation of the sentence to life imprisonment. A cipher message was sent to General Hovey by the war department ordering him to transport the prisoners under sufficient guard back to the Ohio penitentiary where they were to be kept at hard labor for life.³³

The case of Milligan came up for argument in the supreme court in March, 1866. J. E. McDonald, J. S. Black, James A. Garfield, and David Dudley Field were counsel for the petitioner. Mr. Speed, attorney general of the United States, Mr. Stanberry and Benjamin F. Butler, special counsel of the United States, appeared for the government. The only question at issue before the court was the jurisdiction of the military tribunal. Able and elaborate arguments were presented by both sides. On April 3, 1866, the court decided that the military commission had no jurisdiction. In this opinion the court said:

No graver question was ever considered by the court, nor one which more nearly concerns the rights of the whole people; for it is the birth-right of every American citizen, when charged with crime, to be tried and punished according to law. . . . The constitution of the United States is a law for rulers and people, equally in war and in peace, and covers with the shield of its protection all classes of men, at all times and under all circumstances. No doctrine involving more pernicious consequences was ever invented by the wit of man than that any of its provisions can be suspended during any of the great exigencies of government.

³³ Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, pp. 427, 428.

As to the source from which the military commission derived its power the court declared it could not be found in the constitution, act of Congress, or mandate of the President; that it was not complete under the laws and usages of war; that:

Martial laws cannot arise from a threatened invasion. The necessity must be actual and present; the invasion real, such as effectually closes the ports and deposes the civil administration. None of these conditions existed in Indiana at the time of the arrest and trial. . . . Therefore one of the plainest constitutional provisions was infringed when Milligan was tried by a court not ordained and established by congress and not composed of judges appointed during good behavior.

Concerning the crimes imputed to Milligan the court said:

If guilty of these crimes imputed to him, and his guilt had been ascertained by an established court and impartial jury, he deserves severe punishment. Open resistance to the measures deemed necessary to subdue a great rebellion, by those who enjoy the protection of government, and have not the excuse even of prejudice of section to plead in their favor, is wicked; but that wickedness becomes an enormous crime when it assumes the form of a secret political organization, armed to oppose the law, and seeks by stealthy means to introduce the enemies of the country into peaceful communities, there to light the torch of civil war, and thus overthrow the power of the United States.

On April 10, 1866, the war department, directed by the President, ordered the discharge of the prisoners³⁴ who returned to their homes in Indiana after an imprisonment of eighteen months. Indictments were later found against all of the accused, including Dodd. Milligan was arrested and compelled to give bail, but the cases never came to trial.

In the spring of 1868 Milligan brought suit against the members of the military commission for damages. The case, however, was not tried until 1871. Thomas A. Hendricks was the leading council for Milligan and Benjamin Harrison for the defendants.

The trial was a long one and a great part of the history of the Sons of Liberty was given in evidence. Judge Drummond charged the jury, that owing to the two years statute of limitations, the defendants would not be liable for any act prior to March 13, 1866, but that they would be liable for any imprisonment subsequent to that time, which was the result of the previous trial and conviction.³⁵

³⁴ *O. R.* II, Vol. VIII, 10, 548.

³⁵ Foulke, *Life of Morton*, Vol. I, p. 431.

The jury, evidently not disposed to favor Milligan, realizing that the evidence compelled a decision in his favor, brought in a verdict for damages amounting to five dollars. The Democrats hailed the decision the supreme court and this later decision of the State court as a complete vindication of Milligan from the charges preferred against him. This was not a correct inference, because the only question at issue in these cases was the jurisdiction of the military tribunal.

Although this last decision closed the real history of the secret orders in Indiana, in press and on platform, echoes of its purposes and operations were heard for a generation. Republican orators in every campaign paraded its treasonable character before the public as an illustration of Democratic disloyalty. As late as 1882 Senator Daniel W. Voorhees was the victim of a scathing attack on this score in the Senate at the hands of Senator John J. Ingalls of Kansas. And today, in the southern part of the State survivors of those days eagerly dwell on the "dangerous and widespread conspiracy" of the Knights of the Golden Circle and Sons of Liberty.

6. THE CAMP DOUGLAS CONSPIRACY

The humiliating failure of the attempted insurrection during the Democratic national convention in August, 1864, convinced the Confederate commissioners in Canada that the Sons of Liberty could not be depended upon to lead a revolutionary movement in the northwest. Mr. Thompson, writing in December to the Confederate secretary of war, said:

This nomination (McClellan's) followed as it was by divers disclosures and arrests of persons, prominent members, totally demoralized the Sons of Liberty. The feeling with the masses is as strong as ever. They are true, brave, and, I believe, willing and ready, but they have no leaders. The vigilance of the administration, its large detective force . . . added to the large military force stationed in those States, make organization and preparation almost impossible. A large sum of money has been expended in fostering and furthering these operations and it seems to have been to little profit.¹

He recommended that, for the future, they exert their efforts toward inducing those who were conscripted to make

¹ *O. R.* I, Vol. XLIII, pt. 2, p. 931.

their way south to join the southern army. The commissioners then turned their attention to the naval operations on the Great Lakes, the history of which does not belong to these pages.

Captains Hines, Cantrill, Anderson, and a few of the Confederate officers who still lingered in the vicinity of Chicago, did not consider the situation so hopeless. They continued to believe that members of the secret organization could be used to advantage in fomenting a revolution in the rear of the union armies. They conferred with some of the more radical peace men and found that they were still disposed to assist in an attack on Camp Douglas for the purpose of releasing prisoners.

Tuesday, November 8, the night of the Presidential election, was selected as the time for this second attempt. Public interest at that time, they thought, would be centered on the result of the election and the presence of a large body of men from southern Illinois, members of the Sons of Liberty and southern sympathizers, would not create any suspicion in a city the size of Chicago.² Furthermore, the garrison at Camp Douglas had been reduced to 800 men, chiefly of the veteran reserve corps, Colonel E. J. Sweet, commanding. At this time the prisoners numbered between 8,000 and 9,000 Confederates, many of whom were reckless bushwhackers from Morgan's band of raiders.³ Captain Hines was confident, that if these men could be set at liberty, they would create consternation in the northwest. He supplied additional funds for the undertaking. Agents were sent into southern Illinois to arrange for the transportation to Chicago of 1,500 Sons of Liberty and southern sympathizers.⁴

The small Chicago contingent, in the meantime, was employed in the purchase of arms, and the manufacture of ammunition. The home of Charles Walsh, one of the most active of the Sons of Liberty, who lived within a block of Camp Douglas was made the store house and the factory for these amateur revolutionists. The campaign was to be under the direction of Captains Hines and Fielding, Colonels George St.

² *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 58; Testimony of John T. Shanks.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 188; Testimony of Col. B. J. Sweet.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 558; Testimony of Thos. J. Sears.

Leger Grenfel, and Vincent Marmaduke. The plans in general were the same as those adopted for the uprising on August 29, with the exception that the field of operation was to include only Indiana and Illinois. At a given signal on the night of election Camp Douglas was to be attacked from three sides and the Confederate prisoners were to rise in revolt and overpower the guards; arms were to be seized in different parts of the city; telegraph wires were to be cut; banks robbed; and a band sent west to free the prisoners at Rock Island and seize the arsenal. These things accomplished, the forces were to move through Indiana and Illinois, accumulating strength as they proceeded south, to a chosen rendezvous on the Ohio where a junction was to be made with the Confederate forces under Forrest then in Kentucky.

There was some reason for their confidence in a successful attack on Camp Douglas, for, according to Colonel Sweet's testimony, there were not more than 250 men on duty at any one time. The camp, including an area of sixty acres, was surrounded by a board fence twelve feet high and could be easily assailed from either side. A band of 500 men on the outside, working in conjunction with 8,000 seasoned Confederate soldiers on the inside, could readily overpower so small a garrison.⁶ Moreover, the time chosen was a most seasonable one. In the midst of the rejoicing over the result of the election the firing of signal rockets would not be noticed and the presence of the citizens down town would leave the region about the camp practically free of inhabitants.

But the Confederate leaders were again at fault in their estimation of the character of the men with whom they had to deal. Informers were within their own camp. A majority of the members of the Sons of Liberty were men of small calibre and little honor and they admitted into their confidence, as did the order in Indiana, men who had no scruples against the role of informer. These men offered to report the transactions of the order for a stipulated sum per report. Colonel Sweet employed not only these men, but two Confederates who were willing to betray their comrades.⁷ To verify

⁶ *O. R. I.*, Vol. XLV, pt. I, p. 1078; Report of Col. B. J. Sweet.

⁹ *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 190; Testimony of Col. B. J. Sweet.

⁷ John T. Shanks, and Maurice Langhoon.

the reports of these informers he enlisted the services of Colonel Thomas H. Keefe, of the war department secret service, and Captain E. R. P. Shurly of the veteran reserve corps, acting adjutant general at Camp Douglas.⁸ Since the fiasco of August 29, Colonel Sweet had not ceased his vigilance. He learned through these agents that the plan for the release of prisoners had not been abandoned, and that some of the Sons of Liberty were still plotting with Confederate officers. At his request General Hooker, commander of the department, came to Chicago to confer with him. A number of conferences were held with the military, State, and city authorities, all of whom were convinced that a plot for the release of the prisoners was developing.⁹ Colonel Sweet learned that Brigadier General Walsh, military commander of the Sons of Liberty, had notified the order in the southern part of the State that the administration intended to interfere with the election in Chicago by military force, if necessary, in order to secure a Republican victory. This was used as an excuse for arming the members in Chicago, and arranging for the transportation of a large number of the order from the southern part of the State.

The election, it will be remembered, was to take place on Tuesday, November 8. On the 5th Colonel Sweet was informed of the arrival of a large number of suspicious characters from Fayette and Christian counties. On Sunday, the 6th, it became evident that additional bands had arrived in the city, many of whom were escaped Confederate prisoners of war and soldiers of the rebel army.

Colonel Sweet delayed making any arrests, hoping that by Monday, the 7th, all the leaders and many more of the men and arms of the expedition might be captured. But he decided, as he says in his report, that "the great interests involved would scarcely justify taking the inevitable risks of postponement." He, therefore, sent the following dispatch to Brigadier General John Cook, commanding the district of Illinois, urging him to send reinforcements at once.

⁸ *Everybody's Magazine*, Jan., 1900, p. 83.

⁹ *O. R.* I, Vol. XXXIX, pt. II, p. 530; Col. Sweet to Gen. H. E. Paine, Sept. 27, 1864.

The city is filling up with suspicious characters, some of whom are known to be escaped prisoners, and others who were here from Canada during the Chicago convention plotting to release the prisoners of war at Camp Douglas. . . . My force is, as you know, too weak and much overworked, only 800 men all told, to guard between 8,000 and 9,000 prisoners. I am certainly not justified in waiting to take risks, and mean to arrest these officers, if possible, before morning. The head gone, we can manage the body. In order to make these arrests perfect, I must also arrest two or three prominent citizens who are connected with these officers, of which the proof is ample.¹⁰

Acting upon this determination, Colonel Sweet made arrangements at once for a raid on the conspirators. Colonel Lewis C. Skinner, commander of the Eighth veteran reserve corps, was sent with a squad of fifty men to search and guard the house of Charles Walsh; another squad, under command of Captain Pettiplace, was sent to surround the Richmond House; while a third detachment of 100 men, under Captain Strong, marched into the heart of the city to preserve order and arrest suspects.¹¹ After some difficulty Colonel Skinner gained admittance to Walsh's house where he arrested Walsh and three of the Confederate officers—Captains Cantrill, Travers, and Daniel. On the premises were found 210 double barreled shotguns and carbines; 350 revolvers; over 13,000 rounds of ammunition; 344 boxes of caps; 2 kegs of powder; bullet molds, pistol wrenches, and other implements for making cartridges. The shotguns were all loaded with cartridges, composed of from 9 to 12 largest size buck shot, and capped ready for instant use.¹²

At the Richmond House, Colonel St. Leger Grenfel and J. T. Shanks were arrested—the latter for mere form's sake, for he was employed by Colonel Sweet to spy on Grenfel. At the home of Dr. E. W. Edwards, 70 Adams street, Colonel Marmaduke and Captain Hines were known to be stopping. The former was secured, but the latter eluded Detective Keefe. Judge Buckner C. Morris, treasurer of the Sons of Liberty, was next arrested at his home, 6, Washington street. All of these arrests were completed before Monday morning. Reinforcements arrived that day from Springfield and all day

¹⁰ *O. R.* I, Vol. XLV, pt. I, p. 1079.

¹¹ *Everybody's Magazine*, Jan., 1900, p. 90.

¹² *O. R.* Vol. XLV, pt. I, p. 1081.

squads of federal troops and city police were busy arresting members of the Sons of Liberty, Confederate soldiers, and bushwhackers from southern Illinois. Before night 106 of these vagabonds, including the notorious Clingman, leader of a band of cutthroats, were put under arrest and imprisoned in Camp Douglas. A few days later a number of the Sons of Liberty were arrested, among them being Patrick Dooley, secretary of the Temple in Chicago, who had destroyed most of the papers belonging to the order.

These prisoners were examined at Camp Douglas by Colonel Sweet and his assistants. The testimony convinced him that the Sons of Liberty furnished the inspiration for this attempted insurrection and that some of the leaders were in consultation with the rebel officers.¹³ These arrests completely crushed the conspiracy and put an end to further efforts on the part of Confederate commissioners to use the Sons of Liberty in their desperate attempt to create a "fire in the rear."

This exposure, directly preceding the election, furnished the Republicans with a suitable climax to the campaign in Chicago and the northwest. The Republican press teemed with stories of the enormous conspiracy on the part of the Sons of Liberty and claimed, that since only Democrats belonged to the order, the Democratic party was responsible for these treasonable designs. "Vote for Abraham Lincoln!" was the final warning to all "loyal citizens." This blow, coming as it did on the very eve of election, came too late for the Democrats to prove the unreasonableness of the accusations, and so they were forced to go before the people on election day carrying this additional blot on their loyalty.

The exposures of the Sons of Liberty in Indiana, the arrests in Chicago, the glorious victories of the union armies, and the defeat of McClellan at the polls, completed the demoralization of the Sons of Liberty, and the order ceased to exist.

The history of the society, however, is not complete without a brief account of the trial of the Chicago conspirators in the spring of 1865. A military tribunal was convened in Cincinnati on January 9, composed of officers of the army, with Major H. L. Burnett, judge advocate of the department of the

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1080.

Ohio, as prosecutor. After several preliminary sessions the commission met on January 11, and proceeded to the trial of Charles Walsh, Buckner S. Morris, Vincent Marmaduke, R. T. Semmes, Charles T. Daniels, George St. Leger Grenfel, and Benjamin M. Anderson.

The accused submitted a plea against the jurisdiction of the military commission, stating that, the offense charged, not being an infraction of any article of war, they were not amenable, therefore, to its jurisdiction. They prayed that the court would take no further cognizance of the matter, but remit it to the courts of the United States in the northern district of Illinois for trial. This prayer was denied by the commission.

The charges and specifications preferred against these men, practically the same in each case, were as follows:

1. Conspiracy, in violation of the laws of war, to release rebel prisoners confined by authority of the United States at Camp Douglas near Chicago, Illinois.
2. Conspiring to lay waste and destroy the city of Chicago, Illinois, by capturing the arsenal, cutting the telegraph wires, burning railroad depots, taking forcible possession of banks and public buildings, and leaving the city to be sacked, pillaged, and burned by rebel prisoners of war confined at Camp Douglas.¹⁴

To these charges each of the accused pleaded not guilty, and the commission proceeded to take evidence. Ninety-four witnesses were examined, and, although the testimony in the main related directly to the attempted release of prisoners at Camp Douglas, much of the history of the Sons of Liberty as divulged in the Indianapolis trials and told in these pages, was repeated at Cincinnati.

Among the prominent witnesses was Clement L. Vallandigham, who testified to his relationship with the order, but denied any knowledge of its military and treasonable character.¹⁵ His statements, however, are proven to be false by the published correspondence of the Confederate commissioners and the personal account of the attempted insurrection as told by Judge Thomas A. Hines, of the Kentucky bar, whose report is eminently reliable. Mr. Vallandigham may not have

¹⁴ *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 502-518.

been implicated in the Camp Douglas conspiracy of November 8, but it is evident that he knew of the plots prior to that date, and assisted materially in perfecting them. He was too able and shrewd a man, however, to expose his hand at that time. Only the published documents of the commissioners and the personal account of Judge Hines have revealed his connection with the movement.

Another witness was Corning S. Judd, who admitted that he was Grand Commander of the order in Illinois, but asserted that the purpose of the society was nothing more than a closer organization of the Democratic party, and that the State council disbanded in July, 1864.¹⁶ The government examined a number of witnesses who had already testified before the military commission at Indianapolis; among them were J. J. Bingham, James B. Wilson, and Felix G. Stidger. In addition to these were the usual list of informers, whose reputation for truth and veracity, already questionable because of the role which they played, was rendered wholly unreliable by their seeming inability to tell the truth.

In the arguments the lawyer for the defense argued strongly against the jurisdiction of the military commission to try civil cases when the regularly established courts were open.

The judge advocate, in his reply, asserted that the military commission had its justification in the necessity of the case; that in time of war the executive for the time being becomes, and must be, all powerful; that the chief executive officer, as commander-in-chief, is the great fountain head of power, and transmits that power to his subordinates who exercise it in their departments.

In this department General Hooker is the direct representative of the commander-in-chief, the President; in this department he is the judge of the necessity which shall call a military court into existence, and of the means to be employed for the suppression of the rebellion; and there is no other power, judicial or legislative, that can judge of that necessity, or determine the means to be employed to meet the existing emergency.¹⁷

He admitted that some of the witnesses had been seri-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 541.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 577.

ously contradicted and impeached, but in the essential particulars, he contended that their testimony remained uncontradicted and was corroborated by a number of witnesses. Regarding the Sons of Liberty, he said:

That organization was based upon the theory that a State has a right to secede; that each State was sovereign and supreme in, and of itself, and that, therefore, the government had no right to coerce a State. . . . If this nation is merely a confederation of petty sovereign States—if this great republic is merely a combination of separate sovereignties, each having an independent right to secede at will, and the general government has no right to coerce a State which secedes from the general compact, and dissolves at will the general union, then, gentlemen, I have entirely misread our history; the Sons of Liberty are justified in their hostility to the government, and the south must go unrebuked for the fractricidal war which has devastated this land for the past four years. But these are the doctrines of the Order of American Knights and the Sons of Liberty; and the only point in which I can perceive that they differ from the rebels in arms against the government is that the latter have carried into effect what they believed, while the others have not. The one, having avowed his faith, shouldered his musket and marches to the battlefield to fight for the faith that is in him, while the other, with the instincts of a coward, says the doctrine in the abstract is right, but hesitates to join his brother to battle for it. The rebel, with greater consistency, says "That which is abstractly right, we will make practicable."¹⁸

The commission, after a session lasting from January 9 to April 19, brought in its verdict. Semmes and Walsh were convicted and sentenced to three and five years, respectively, in the Ohio penitentiary; Grenfel and Daniels were sentenced to be hanged; and Morris and Marmaduke were acquitted. Daniels had escaped from confinement during the trial and Anderson had committed suicide in prison sometime before the trial was concluded.¹⁹ Immediately after the verdict was rendered the members of the commission requested the commanding general to pardon Walsh and remit his sentence.²⁰ After a brief confinement both he and Semmes were liberated. Daniels was not recaptured and Grenfel's sentence was afterward commuted to "imprisonment for life, at hard labor, at the "Dry Tortugas," by order of President Johnson.²¹ It

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 585.

¹⁹ *O. R.* II, Vol. VIII, p. 684.

²⁰ *House Exec. Doc.* No. 50, p. 574.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 653.

appears, however, from the records that Grenfel was never taken to that island but to Fort Jefferson, Florida, from which place he escaped on March 7, 1868.²² With his escape the history of the Camp Douglas conspiracy was ended.

7. CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters the extent and operation of these secret political societies existing at the time of the Civil war have been related. This chapter will be devoted to the discussion of their actual influence on the struggle of 1861 to 1865. In order to do this we need to review the character of the membership; the political and military purposes of the majority; the relation of the societies to the southern Confederacy; the character of the witnesses who exposed the orders; and the role which partisan spirit played in these exposures and in the general estimate of the societies.

First as to the character of the membership. It will be remembered that the Republicans in every campaign attacked the Democratic party for harboring and fostering these treasonable societies, declaring that the leaders of the party, if not actually members, were in active sympathy with the purposes of the orders and expected to reap the results of their machinations. Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, in a speech made in the House of Representatives in February, 1863, declared:

I verily believe the members of the Democratic party throughout the North are holding secret meetings under the name of the Knights of the Golden Circle, and plotting to seize the government and depose the President.

Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, in the same session declared:

There is not on this continent today, in any town, city, county or State, a political organization a man can enter and be a traitor but a Democratic organization.

Governor Morton repeatedly made similar assertions. As late as 1866 in his arraignment of the Democratic party, he

²² *O. R.* II, Vol. VIII, p. 928.

declared that the leaders, then managing the party, were the men who

Introduced and organized in this State the widespread conspiracy, first known as the Knights of the Golden Circle and afterward as the Sons of Liberty, which had for its purpose the overthrow of the State and National governments.

The Republican press, both east and west, was full of similar assertions, particularly during the political campaigns.

Such statements had more of vote-winning power than truth in them. While it is true that the membership in these organizations was recruited, almost to a man, from the ranks of the Democratic party, it is wholly unfair to assume that that party as a national organization in any sense fostered these secret societies. It is not even correct to assert that the Democratic party leaders in the States where the orders were most flourishing, were all in sympathy with them. Even in Indiana many of the prominent Democrats strongly opposed the establishment of lodges in the State, and when the treasonable plans of the few leaders of the order became apparent they offered to assist the governor in exposing them. It is true that Mr. Bingham, Mr. Milligan, Congressman Kerr and a number of prominent Democrats were members and took an active part in promoting the societies. It is also true that some of the leaders, Mr. Voorhees and others, who were not members, expressed their sympathy with the movement, and for that reason they deserved the severe condemnation which they received at the time. The prominent Democrats, however, who were directly implicated in the treasonable plots of August, 1864, can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Governor Yates, of Illinois, in an address delivered in Chicago in November, 1864, said:

I do not believe that one-half—no, not one-fourth—of the Democratic party which is now ranged under the banner of McClellan and standing on the Chicago platform is disloyal to the country.

President Lincoln said to Senator McDonald of Indiana:

Nothing can make me believe that 100,000 Indiana Democrats are disloyal.

The facts seem to be these: the membership was composed chiefly of the more ignorant portion of the Democratic

party, and the societies were regarded from the beginning by the leaders, as a thorn in the flesh which they tried to get rid of, but which they were forced to carry until the wound festered and left a scar which did not disappear for a generation.

In a determination of the purposes of these orders we need to consider not only those stated in the rituals and those indicated by the treasonable conduct of some of the leaders, but also the intentions, as far as they can be determined, of the mass of the membership. Judge Advocate Holt, in his extended report to Secretary of War Stanton in the fall of 1864, summarized the purposes of the order and set forth eleven specific aims which the leaders had in view from the beginning. They are as follows:

1. Aiding soldiers to desert and harboring and protecting deserters.
2. Discouraging enlistments and resisting the draft.
3. Circulating disloyal and treasonable publications.
4. Communicating with and giving intelligence to the enemy.
5. Aiding the enemy by recruiting for them or assisting them to recruit within our lines.
6. Furnishing the rebels with arms, ammunition, etc.
7. Co-operating with the enemy in raids and invasions.
8. Destruction of government property.
9. Destruction of private property and persecution of loyal men.
10. Assassination and murder.
11. Establishment of a Northwest Confederacy.

These purposes, according to his report, were to be accomplished by means of both the political and military departments of the order; the latter being well-armed and ready for an aggressive movement.

As to the political purposes of the order, the constitution of the Sons of Liberty gave as its object the maintenance of constitutional freedom and states rights, as recognized and established by the founders of the republic. The Declaration of Principles in the Vestibule degree indicated the same purpose. It was this degree alone which a majority of the members took. In other words, a majority of the members joined what they understood to be a Democratic club whose purpose was the maintenance of the established principles of the Democratic party. This conclusion is derived from the mass of evidence given during the trials and from investigations insti-

tuted at the time and from recent statements made by men well acquainted with the order. Of course, we need to take into consideration the fact that the members of the orders would not admit, even on the witness stand, any treasonable motives on their part; but the above conclusion is corroborated by the government witnesses who gave otherwise damaging testimony against the leaders in the August and November conspiracies. Even Mr. Stidger, whom the government regarded as one of its most reliable witnesses, admitted that when he initiated men into the order he was careful to say nothing about the unwritten military part of the ritual.

It is true that a large number of the members took part in the military drills at lodge meetings, and in some cases were organized into companies and regiments; yet the evidence indicates that a majority of these men understood that they were drilling for the purpose of protecting themselves, their property, and their rights, against what they believed, was the usurpation and tyranny of the Republican administration. There is no evidence to show that this majority had any intention of assisting the South. That there was a minority of the members who had treasonable intentions against the government cannot be doubted; but the declaration that all were conspirators who joined the organization, heard the ritual read, and took the obligation, is false.

It was repeatedly asserted that the members were in constant communication with the rebels. Individual members, possibly a considerable number, did aid soldiers to desert, harbored and protected the deserters, discouraged enlistment, openly and violently opposed the draft, hampered in every way possible the State and national administrations; and a smaller number secretly conspired with the Confederate agents in Canada to establish a Northwest Confederacy; but there is no reliable and sufficient evidence to prove that there was a well organized system of communication with the rebels by which they were assisted to recruit within the union lines, furnished with arms or ammunition from the north, or aided in the destruction of government property.

Frequently the statement was made that the orders knew of intended Confederate raids into northern territory. It is

absurd to suppose that the Confederates gave notice of such movements to these so-called friendly allies, for such information would certainly have defeated the purpose of the expedition. A careful search has been made through the Confederate sources, biographies, diaries, newspapers, and official reports, for some statement indicating the co-operation of the societies with the rebels, but nowhere has such co-operation been discovered, except the conspiracies on the Canadian border which have already been discussed. Further, the replies from a number of men in the south who were closely associated with the Confederate leaders deny any communication, whatever, on the part of the Confederate government with these societies. Judge Hines, from whom we have quoted at length in the preceding chapter, says on this point:

The assertion, which has been gravely and officially made, that there was at any time during the war a political organization, including northern and southern men alike in its ranks, and affording certain means of communication between the Copperheads of the north and the rebels of the south . . . was utterly without truth or foundation.

An examination of the evidence of the large number of witnesses who at different times gave testimony concerning the operations of the societies, will convince the reader that the officials of the government were hard pressed for straightforward and conclusive proofs to substantiate the extravagant statements which they made concerning the treasonable character of the orders.

Judge Advocate Holt, in his report, discussed at some length the witnesses and their testimony. He characterized them as shrewd, intelligent men, actuated by laudable motives; members of the order, who upon a full acquaintance with its principles, were appalled by its infamous designs; officers of high rank in the order, who were prompted to make confessions; all of whom he regarded as reliable and trustworthy men. He pointed out in particular, the testimony of the female witness, Mary Ann Pitman, who was the chief authority for Provost Marshal Sanderson's report from St. Louis concerning the co-operation of the northern branch of the order of American Knights with the southern branch under the command of General Sterling Price. A casual reading of her

sworn statement cannot fail to convince the reader of its credibility. The judge described Felix Stidger as a man of rare fidelity, who at great personal risk furnished the government with information leading to the exposure of the orders in Indiana and Kentucky. The suspicious character of some of Mr. Stidger's evidence has already been discussed. Another witness upon whom the government seemed to rely was J. Winslow Ayer, one of Colonel Sweet's agents in the Chicago lodges of the Sons of Liberty. Dr. Ayer was a street agent for a patent medicine. He came to Colonel Sweet and agreed to furnish him with information for so much per report. The colonel employed him, but had so little confidence in his reliability that he used government detectives to verify his statements. Ayer's account of the plotting of the Sons of Liberty, when measured by the testimony of other witnesses who were thoroughly acquainted with the facts, seems distorted and unreliable. In his testimony at Cincinnati he stated that he was a graduate of the Eclectic medical school of that city. A sworn statement of the dean of the faculty indicates that Ayer never attended a course of lectures in that school. Another witness of the same kind was Dr. Henry L. Zumro, the chief government witness against Milligan. He was a member of the Sons of Liberty and as such was employed by the government at a salary of \$100 per month to expose the disloyal intentions of his compatriots. His reputation was considerably clouded by the testimony of witnesses in the treason trials at Indianapolis, who testified under oath that his reputation for truth and veracity was bad. The efforts of the prosecution to impeach these statements concerning Zumro proved futile. In the main the important witnesses were men of no standing in the communities in which they lived. They were either men who turned state's evidence in order to save themselves, or men who took the vows and obligations of these secret orders with the deliberate and premeditated intention of violating these oaths and betraying their brothers, many of whom they were directly instrumental in bringing into the organizations.

Their evidence, however, was sufficiently consistent and corroborative on the main facts in the case, to warrant the

severe sentences meted out to the conspirators in both trials; these men deserved the extreme penalty of the law. But it was not sufficient to justify the extravagant statements made in the official reports implicating all the members of the orders in a grand conspiracy to overthrow the government by fomenting a revolution in the rear of the union armies. No such treasonable motives can be justly attributed to so large a body of northern citizens.

The influence which led to the extravagant reports and conduct of the government officials toward these organizations was the excessive partisan spirit then existing. Governor Morton and the leaders who joined him in hounding these societies to death regarded the safety of the union as dependent upon the supremacy of the Republican party. To them the government, the administration, and the Republican party were synonymous terms. Any citizen who attacked either was disloyal to his country. There was, too, an element of justice in this radical view. The government was engaged in a struggle for its existence. All the power and force at its command had been called into requisition, and after nearly four years of struggle, the enemy had not been overcome. At such a time opposition to the party in power becomes opposition to the government. As Governor Morton said in his proclamation of June, 1863:

That which is idle talk in time of peace may become aid and comfort to the enemy in time of war.

A rebellion can be aided in other ways than by food, clothing, arms, and medicine. It needs hope and sympathy; and nothing so buoyed up the hopes of the southern States as the signs of opposition and disaffection on the part of those who still maintained their allegiance to the federal government.

Governor Yates in his message of January, 1863, said:

The secessionists' strongest hope and main reliance is a divided north.

And Secretary of War Stanton declared:

A chief hope of those who set the rebellion on foot was aid and comfort from disloyal sympathizers in the northern States whose efforts were relied upon to divide and distract the people of the north and prevent

them from putting forth their whole strength to preserve the national government.

There were many in the north who opposed the war from humanitarian motives; many who were tired of the horrible waste of life and treasure; and many who honestly protested against the suspension of the rights of the citizen; but to the radical Republican it made little difference what the character of the opposition was. He who did not acquiesce in the judgment of the administration was a "traitor" and a "secessionist." The great mistake of the majority of the Democratic party was the failure to distinguish between partisan opposition in time of peace and in time of war. Their inclination to criticise severely the mistakes of the party in power furnished an excuse for the more radical opposition on the part of the extremists, as represented by the peace Democrats in the northwest. It also furnished a cloak behind which disappointed politicians of the type of Vallandigham, Dodd, Bowles, and Walker could organize secret societies, and in the name of these organizations carry on their treasonable conspiracies. In so far as the opposition encouraged such hostility to the administration it merits the severest condemnation.

The facts in regard to these societies and the acts of treason attributed to them seem to be about as follows: A dozen or more restless and unprincipled leaders in the Democratic party, who saw their political influence rapidly waning, organized these secret societies and drew into their folds a large number of ignorant opponents of the administration, who were dazzled by the elements of secrecy. Encouraged by the mushroom growth of the order and desirous of immediate political power, these leaders, tempted by Confederate money, conceived, in conjunction with the Confederate commissioners, a treasonable plot to overthrow the government in the northwestern States and organize the territory into a separate confederacy, or, failing in this, to throw the influence of these States to the south. It is not credible that a tenth of the nominal membership of the order knew of the plans for the uprisings and it is not at all probable that this tenth would have followed these leaders if the insurrection had actually broken out. From first to last these organizations were singularly

lacking in energy and initiative. They were as impotent for any concerted action as an association of children. Some of the officers commanding departments regarded their movements with alarm, and frequently urged the general government to adopt measures for their suppression. The President, and the authorities at Washington, on the other hand, while seriously disturbed by the widespread disaffection in the border States, looked upon the machinations of the leaders of these particular societies with "good-humored contempt" and saw in their movements a nearly equal mixture of puerility and malice. A careful investigation of all the available material regarding their purpose, membership, extent, and operations, has led the author of this monograph to the same conclusion.